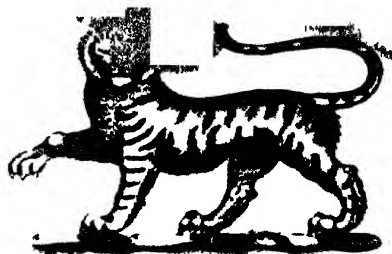


H.E. THE GOVERNOR OF BENGAL



SCOTTISH SHORT STORIES

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AN ANTHOLOGY

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE



THE RULE governing the selection of stories for the following collection was, not merely that they should be the work of writers of Scottish birth, but that they should deal also with Scottish characters and the Scottish scene.

The publishers owe thanks to living writers whose stories appear in the following pages, and they make grateful acknowledgment to Miss Janet B. Oliphant and Messrs. William Blackwood & Sons for agreeing to the republication in this form of "The Open Door," by Mrs. Oliphant; to Messrs. Blackwood for "The Lost Pibroch" and "War," from *The Lost Pibroch* by Neil Munro, of "The Outgoing of the Tide," from *The Watcher by the Threshold*, by John Buchan, and of "The Touch of Spring," from *Gray Mantle and Gold Fringe*, by David Storrar Meldrum; to Messrs. Chatto & Windus for "Thrawn Janet," from *The Merry Men and Other Tales*, by Robert Louis Stevenson; to Mr. Lloyd Osbourne and Messrs. Cassell & Co., for "The Tale of Tod Lapraik," from *Catriona*, by the same author; to Messrs. Gerald Duckworth & Co., for "Beattock for Moffat," from *Scottish Stories*, by R. B. Cunningham-Graham; to Messrs. Ernest Benn, for "The Tutor of Curlywee," from *The Stickit Minister*, by S. R. Crockett; to Mr. John Murray, for "The Little Tinker," from *Seen and Heard*, by Mary and

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Jane Findlater; to Messrs. William Hodge & Co., for "Captain Pert," from *Tales of Hate*, by Winifred Duke; and to The Porpoise Press, for "Half Light" and "The Moor," from *Hidden Doors*, by Neil M. Gunn.

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BY
SIR WALTER SCOTT



THE TWO DROVERS

IT WAS the day after Doune Fair when my story commences. It had been a brisk market; several dealers had attended from the northern and midland counties in England, and English money had flown so merrily about as to gladden the hearts of the Highland farmers. Many large droves were about to set off for England, under the protection of their owners, or of the tops-men whom they employed in the tedious, laborious, and responsible office of driving the cattle for many hundred miles, from the market where they had been purchased, to the fields or farmyards where they were to be fattened for the shambles.

The Highlanders, in particular, are masters of this difficult trade of driving, which seems to suit them as well as the trade of war. It affords exercise for all their habits of patient endurance and active exertion. They are required to know perfectly the drove-roads, which lie over the wildest tracts of the country, and to avoid as much as possible the highways, which distress the feet of the bullocks, and the turnpikes, which annoy the spirit of the drover; whereas, on the broad green or grey track, which leads across the pathless moor, the herd not only move at ease and

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without taxation, but, if they mind their business, may pick up a mouthful of food by the way. At night, the drovers usually sleep along with their cattle, let the weather be what it will; and many of these hardy men do not once rest under a roof during a journey on foot from Lochaber to Lincolnshire. They are paid very highly, for the trust reposed is of the last importance, as it depends on their prudence, vigilance, and honesty, whether the cattle reach the final market in good order, and afford a profit to the grazier. But as they maintain themselves at their own expense, they are especially economical in that particular. At the period we speak of, a Highland drover was victualled for his long and toilsome journey with a few handfuls of oatmeal, and two or three onions, renewed from time to time, and a ram's horn filled with whisky, which he used regularly, but sparingly, every night and morning. His dirk, or *skene-dhu* (i.e., black-knife), so worn as to be concealed beneath the arm, or by the folds of the plaid, was his only weapon, excepting the cudgel with which he directed the movements of the cattle. A Highlander was never so happy as on these occasions. There was a variety in the whole journey, which exercised the Celt's natural curiosity and love of motion; there were the constant change of place and scene, the petty adventures incidental to the traffic; and the intercourse with the various farmers, graziers, and traders, intermingled with occasional merry-makings, not the less acceptable to Donald that they were void of expense—and there was the consciousness of superior skill; for the Highlander, a child amongst flocks, is a prince amongst herds, and his natural

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habits induce him to disdain the shepherd's slothful life, so that he feels himself nowhere more at home than when following a gallant drove of his country cattle in the character of their guardian.

Of the number who left Doune in the morning, and with the purpose we described, not a *Gluamie* of them all cocked his bonnet more briskly, or gartered his tartan hose under knee over a pair of more promising *spiogs* (legs) than did Robin Oig M'Com-bich, called familiarly Robin Oig, that is, Young, or the Lesser, Robin. Though small of stature, as the epithet Oig implies, and not very strongly limbed, he was as light and alert as one of the deer of his mountains. He had an elasticity of step which, in the course of a long march, made many a stout fellow envy him; and the manner in which he busked his plaid and adjusted his bonnet, argued a consciousness that so smart a John Highlandman as himself would not pass unnoticed among the Lowland lasses. The ruddy cheek, red lips, and white teeth, set off a countenance which had gained by exposure to the weather a healthful and hardy rather than a rugged hue. If Robin Oig did not laugh, or even smile frequently, as indeed is not the practice among his countrymen, his bright eyes usually gleamed from under his bonnet with an expression of cheerfulness ready to be turned into mirth.

The departure of Robin Oig was an incident in the little town, in and near which he had many friends, male and female. He was a topping person in his way, transacted considerable business on his own behalf, and was entrusted by the best farmers in the Highlands, in preference to any other drover in

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that district. He might have increased his business to any extent had he condescended to manage it by deputy; but except a lad or two, sister's sons of his own, Robin rejected the idea of assistance, conscious, perhaps, how much his reputation depended upon his attending in person to the practical discharge of his duty in every instance. He remained, therefore, contented with the highest premium given to persons of his description, and comforted himself with the hopes that a few journeys to England might enable him to conduct business on his own account, in a manner becoming his birth. For Robin Oig's father, Lachlan M'Combich (or *son of my friend*, his actual clan-surname being M'Gregor), had been so called by the celebrated Rob Roy, because of the particular friendship which had subsisted between the grand-sire of Robin and that renowned cateran. Some people even say that Robin Oig derived his Christian name from one as renowned in the wilds of Loch Lomond as ever was his namesake Robin Hood, in the precincts of merry Sherwood. "Of such ancestry," as James Boswell says, "who would not be proud?" Robin Oig was proud accordingly; but his frequent visits to England and to the Lowlands had given him tact enough to know that pretensions, which still gave him a little right to distinction in his own lonely glen, might be both obnoxious and ridiculous if preferred elsewhere. The pride of birth, therefore, was like the miser's treasure, the secret subject of his contemplation, but never exhibited to strangers as a subject of boasting.

Many were the words of gratulation and good luck which were bestowed on Robin Oig. The judges

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commended his drove, especially Robin's own property, which were the best of them. Some thrust out their snuff-mulls for the parting pinch—others tendered the *doch-an-dorrach*, or parting cup. All cried—"Good luck travel out with you and come home with you. Give you luck in the Saxon market—brave notes in the *leabhar-dhu*" (black pocket-book), "and plenty of English gold in the *sporrán*" (pouch of goatskin).

The bonny lasses made their adieus more modestly and more than one, it was said, would have given her best brooch to be certain that it was upon her that his eye last rested as he turned towards the road.

Robin Oig had just given the preliminary "*Hoo-hoo!*" to urge forward the loiterers of the drove, when there was a cry behind him.

"Stay, Robin—bide a blink. Here is Janet of Tomahourich—auld Janet, your father's sister."

"Plague on her, for an auld Highland witch and spaewife," said a farmer from the Carse of Stirling; "she'll cast some of her cantrips on the cattle."

"She canna do that," said another sapient of the same profession—"Robin Oig is no the lad to leave any of them, without tying St. Mungo's knot on their tails, and that will put to her speed the best witch that ever flew over Dimayet upon a broomstick."

It may not be indifferent to the reader to know that the Highland cattle are peculiarly liable to be *taken*, or infected, by spells and witchcraft; which judicious people guard against by knitting knots of peculiar complexity on the tuft of hair which terminates the animal's tail.

But the old woman who was the object of the farmer's suspicion seemed only busied about the drover, without paying any attention to the drove. Robin, on the contrary, appeared rather impatient of her presence.

"What auld-world fancy," he said, "has brought you so early from the ingle-side this morning, Muhme? I am sure I bid you good-even, and had your God-speed, last night."

"And left me more siller than the useless old woman will use till you come back again, bird of my bosom," said the sibyl. "But it is little I would care for the food that nourishes me, or the fire that warms me, or for God's blessed sun itself, if aught but weel should happen to the grandson of my father. So let me walk the *deasil* round you, that you may go safe out into the foreign land, and come safe home."

Robin Oig stopped, half embarrassed, half laughing, and signing to those near that he only complied with the old woman to soother her humour. In the meantime, she traced around him, with wavering steps, the propitiation, which some have thought has been derived from the Druidical mythology. It consists, as is well known, in the person who makes the *deasil* walking three times round the person who is the object of the ceremony, taking care to move according to the course of the sun. At once, however, she stopped short, and exclaimed, in a voice of alarm and horror, "Grandson of my father, there is blood on your hand."

"Hush, for God's sake, aunt," said Robin Oig; "you will bring more trouble on yourself with this *taishataragh*" (second sight) "than you will be able

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to get out for many a day."

The old woman only repeated, with a ghastly look, "There is blood on your hand, and it is English blood. The blood of the Gael is richer and redder. Let us see—let us——"

Ere Robin Oig could prevent her, which, indeed, could only have been done by positive violence, so hasty and peremptory were her proceedings, she had drawn from his side the dirk which lodged in the folds of his plaid, and held it up, exclaiming, although the weapon gleamed clear and bright in the sun, "Blood, blood—Saxon blood again. Robin Oig M'Combich, go not this day to England!"

"Prutt trutt," answered Robin Oig, "that will never do neither—it would be next thing to running the country. For shame, Muhme—give me the dirk. You cannot tell by the colour the difference betwixt the blood of a black bullock and a white one, and you speak of knowing Saxon from Gaelic blood. All men have their blood from Adam, Muhme. Give me my skene-dhu, and let me go on my road. I should have been half-way to Stirling Brig by this time. Give me my dirk, and let me go."

"Never will I give it to you," said the old woman—"Never will I quit my hold on your plaid, unless you promise me not to wear that unhappy weapon."

The women around him urged him also, saying few of his aunt's words fell to the ground; and as the Lowland farmers continued to look moodily on the scene, Robin Oig determined to close it at any sacrifice.

"Well, then," said the young drover, giving the scabbard of the weapon to Hugh Morrison, "you

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Lowlanders care nothing for these freats. Keep my dirk for me. I cannot give it to you, because it was my father's; but your drove follows ours, and I am content it should be in your keeping, not in mine. Will this do, Muhme?"

"It must," said the old woman—"that is, if the Lowlander is mad enough to carry the knife."

The strong westlandman laughed aloud.

"Goodwife," said he, "I am Hugh Morrison from Glenae, come of the Manly Morrisons of auld langsyne, that never took short weapon against a man in their lives. And neither needed they. They had their broadswords, and I have this bit supple," showing a formidable cudgel—"for dirking ower the board, I leave that to John Highlandman—ye needna snort, none of you Highlanders, and you in especial, Robin. I'll keep the bit knife, if you are feared for the auld spaewife's tale, and give it back to you whenever you want it."

Robin was not particularly pleased with some part of Hugh Morrison's speech; but he had learned in his travels more patience than belonged to his Highland constitution originally, and he accepted the service of the descendant of the Manly Morrisons without finding fault with the rather depreciating manner in which it was offered.

"If he had not had his morning in his head, and been but a Dumfriesshire hog into the boot, he would have spoken more like a gentleman. But you cannot have more of a sow than a grumph. It's shame my father's knife should ever slash a haggis for the like of him."

Thus saying (but saying it in Gaelic), Robin drove

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on his cattle, and waved farewell to all behind him. He was in the greater haste, because he expected to join at Falkirk a comrade and brother in profession, with whom he proposed to travel in company.

Robin Oig's chosen friend was a young Englishman, Harry Wakefield by name, well known at every northern market, and in his way as much famed and honoured as our Highland driver of bullocks. He was nearly six feet high, gallantly formed to keep the rounds at Smithfield, or maintain the ring at a wrestling match; and although he might have been overmatched, perhaps, among the regular professors of the Fancy, yet, as a yokel, or rustic, or a chance customer, he was able to give a bellyful to any amateur of the pugilistic art. Doncaster races saw him in his glory, betting his guinea, and generally successfully; nor was there a main fought in Yorkshire, the feeders being persons of celebrity, at which he was not to be seen, if business permitted. But though a *sprack* lad, and fond of pleasure and its haunts, Harry Wakefield was steady, and not the cautious Robin Oig M^cCombich himself was more attentive to the main chance. His holidays were holidays indeed; but his days of work were dedicated to steady and persevering labour. In countenance and temper, Wakefield was the model of old England's merry yeomen, whose clothyard shafts, in so many hundred battles, asserted her superiority over the nations, and whose good sabres, in our own time, are her cheapest and most assured defence. His mirth was readily excited; for, strong in limb and constitution, and fortunate in circumstances, he was disposed to be pleased with everything about him;

and such difficulties as he might occasionally encounter were, to a man of his energy, rather matter of amusement than serious annoyance. With all the merits of a sanguine temper, our young English drover was not without his defects. He was irascible, sometimes to the verge of being quarrelsome; and perhaps not the less inclined to bring his disputes to a pugilistic decision, because he found few antagonists able to stand up to him in the boxing ring.

It is difficult to say how Harry Wakefield and Robin Oig first became intimates; but it is certain a close acquaintance had taken place betwixt them, although they had apparently few common subjects of conversation or of interest, so soon as their talk ceased to be of bullocks. Robin Oig, indeed, spoke the English language rather imperfectly upon any other topics but stots and kyloes, and Harry Wakefield could never bring his broad Yorkshire tongue to utter a single word of Gaelic. It was in vain Robin spent a whole morning, during a walk over Minch Moor, in attempting to teach his companion to utter, with true precision, the shibboleth *Llhu*, which is the Gaelic for a calf. From Traquair to Murder-cairn, the hill rang with the discordant attempts of the Saxon upon the unmanageable monosyllable, and the heartfelt laugh which followed every failure. They had, however, better modes of awakening the echoes; for Wakefield could sing many a ditty to the praise of Moll, Susan, and Cicely, and Robin Oig had a particular gift at whistling interminable pibrochs through all their involutions, and what was more agreeable to his companion's southern ear, knew many of the northern airs, both lively and pathetic,

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to which Wakefield learned to pipe a bass. This, though Robin could hardly have comprehended his companion's stories about horse-racing, and cock-fighting or fox-hunting, and although his own legends of clan-fights and *creaghs*, varied with talk of Highland goblins and fairy folk, would have been caviare to his companion, they contrived nevertheless to find a degree of pleasure in each other's company, which had for three years back induced them to join company and travel together, when the direction of their journey permitted. Each, indeed, found his advantage in this companionship; for where could the Englishman have found a guide through the Western Highlands like Robin Oig M'Combich? and when they were on what Harry called the *right* side of the Border, his patronage, which was extensive, and his purse, which was heavy, were at all times at the service of his Highland friend, and on many occasions his liberality did him genuine yeoman's service.

II

Were ever two such loving friends!—

How could they disagree?

Oh thus it was, he loved him dear,

And thought how to requite him,

• And having no friend left but he,

He did resolve to fight him.

Duke upon Duke.

The pair of friends had traversed with their usual cordiality the grassy wilds of Liddesdale, and crossed the opposite part of Cumberland, emphatically called The Waste. In these solitary regions, the cattle under the charge of our drovers derived their sub-

sistence chiefly by picking their food as they went along the drove-road, or sometimes by the tempting opportunity of a *start and owerloup*, or invasion of the neighbouring pasture, where an occasion presented itself. But now the scene changed before them; they were descending towards a fertile and enclosed country, where no such liberties could be taken with impunity, or without a previous arrangement and bargain with the possessors of the ground. This was more especially the case, as a great northern fair was upon the eve of taking place, where both the Scotch and English drover expected to dispose of a part of their cattle, which it was desirable to produce in the market, rested and in good order. Fields were therefore difficult to be obtained, and only upon high terms. This necessity occasioned a temporary separation betwixt the two friends, who went to bargain, each as he could, for the separate accommodation of his herd. Unhappily it chanced that both of them, unknown to each other, thought of bargaining for the ground they wanted on the property of a country gentleman of some fortune, whose estate lay in the neighbourhood. The English drover applied to the bailiff on the property, who was known to him. It chanced that the Cumbrian squire, who had entertained some suspicions of his manager's honesty, was taking occasional measures to ascertain how far they were well founded, and had desired that any inquiries about his enclosures, with a view to occupy them for a temporary purpose, should be referred to himself. As, however, Mr. Ireby had gone the day before upon a journey of some miles' distance to the northward, the bailiff chose to consider the check

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upon his full powers as for the time removed, and concluded that he should best consult his master's interest, and perhaps his own, in making an agreement with Harry Wakefield. Meanwhile, ignorant of what his comrade was doing, Robin Oig, on his side, chanced to be overtaken by a good-looking, smart little man upon a pony, most knowingly hogged and cropped, as was then the fashion, the rider wearing tight leather breeches and long-necked bright spurs. This cavalier asked one or two pertinent questions about markets and the price of stock. So Robin, seeing him a well-judging civil gentleman, took the freedom to ask him whether he could let him know if there was any grass-land to be let in that neighbourhood, for the temporary accommodation of his drove. He could not have put the question to more willing ears. The gentleman of the buckskin was the proprietor with whose bailiff Harry Wakefield had dealt or was in the act of dealing.

"Thou art in good luck, my canny Scot," said Mr. Ireby, "to have spokena to me, for I see the cattle have done their day's work, and I have at my disposal the only field within three miles that is to be let in these parts."

"The drove can pe gang two, three, four miles very pratty weel indeed," said the cautious Highlander; "put what would his honour be axing for the peasts pe the head, if she was to tak the park for twa or three days?"

"We won't differ, Sawney, if you let me have six stots for winterers, in the way of reason."

"And which peasts wad your honour pe for having?"

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"Why—let me see—the two black—the dun one—yon doddy—him with the twisted horn—the brocket. How much by the head?"

"Ah," said Robin, "your honour is a shudge—a real shudge—I couldna have set off the pest six peasts petter mysell, me that ken them as if they were my pairns, puir things."

"Well, how much per head, Sawney?" continued Mr. Ireby.

"It was high markets at Doune and Falkirk," answered Robin.

And thus the conversation proceeded, until they had agreed on the *prix juste* for the bullocks, the squire throwing in the temporary accommodation of the enclosure for the cattle into the boot, and Robin making, as he thought, a very good bargain, provided the grass was but tolerable. The squire walked his pony alongside of the drove, partly to show him the way, and see him put into possession of the field, and partly to learn the latest news of the northern markets.

They arrived at the field, and the pasture seemed excellent. But what was their surprise when they saw the bailiff quietly inducting the cattle of Harry Wakefield into the grassy Goshen which had just been assigned to those of Robin Oig M'Combich by the proprietor himself! Squire Ireby set spurs to his horse, dashed up to his servant, and learning what had passed between the parties, briefly informed the English drover that his bailiff had let the ground without his authority, and that he might seek grass for his cattle wherever he would, since he was to get none there. At the same time he rebuked his servant

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severely for having transgressed his commands, and ordered him instantly to assist in ejecting the hungry, and weary cattle of Harry Wakefield, which were just beginning to enjoy a meal of unusual plenty, and to introduce those of his comrade, whom the English drover now began to consider as a rival.

The feelings which arose in Wakefield's mind would have induced him to resist Mr. Ireby's decision; but every Englishman has a tolerably accurate sense of law and justice, and John Fleece-bumpkin, the bailiff, having acknowledged that he had exceeded his commission, Wakefield saw nothing else for it than to collect his hungry and disappointed charge, and drive them on to seek quarters elsewhere. Robin Oig saw what had happened with regret, and hastened to offer to his English friend to share with him the disputed possession. But Wakefield's pride was severely hurt, and he answered disdainfully, "Take it all, man—take it all—never make two bites of a cherry—thou canst talk over the gentry, and bear a plain man's eye. Out upon you, man—I would not kiss any man's dirty latchets for leave to bake in his oven."

Robin Oig, sorry but not surprised at his comrade's displeasure, hastened to entreat his friend to wait but an hour till he had gone to the squire's house to receive payment for the cattle he had sold, and he would come back and help him to drive the cattle into some convenient place of rest, and explain to him the whole mistake they had both of them fallen into. But the Englishman continued indignant: "Thou hast been selling, hast thou? Aye, aye—thou is a cunning lad for kenning the hours of bargaining. Go

to the devil with thyself, for I will ne'er see thy fause loon's visage again—thou should be ashamed to look me in the face."

"I am ashamed to look no man in the face," said Robin Oig, something moved; "and, moreover, I will look you in the face this blessed day, if you will bide at the clachan down yonder."

"Mayhap you had as well keep away," said his comrade; and turning his back on his former friend, he collected his unwilling associates, assisted by the bailiff, who took some real and some affected interest in seeing Wakefield accommodated.

After spending some time in negotiating with more than one of the neighbouring farmers, who could not, or would not, afford the accommodation desired, Henry Wakefield at last, and in his necessity, accomplished his point by means of the landlord of the ale-house at which Robin Oig and he had agreed to pass the night, when they first separated from each other. Mine host was content to let him turn his cattle on a piece of barren moor, at a price little less than the bailiff had asked for the disputed enclosure; and the wretchedness of the pasture, as well as the price paid for it, were set down as exaggerations of the breach of faith and friendship of his Scottish crony. This turn of Wakefield's passions was encouraged by the bailiff (who had his own reasons for being offended against poor Robin, as having been the unwitting cause of his falling into disgrace with his master), as well as by the innkeeper, and two or three chance guests, who stimulated the drover in his resentment against his quondam associate—some from the ancient grudge against

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the Scots which, when it exists anywhere, is to be found lurking in the Border counties, and some from the general love of mischief, which characterizes mankind in all ranks of life, to the honour of Adam's children be it spoken. Good John Barleycorn also, who always heightens and exaggerates the prevailing passions, be they angry or kindly, was not wanting in his offices on this occasion; and confusion to false friends and hard masters was pledged in more than one tankard.

In the meanwhile Mr. Ireby found some amusement in detaining the northern drover at his ancient hall. He caused a cold round of beef to be placed before the Scot in the butler's pantry, together with a foaming tankard of home-brewed, and took pleasure in seeing the hearty appetite with which these unwonted edibles were discussed by Robin Oig M'Combich. The squire himself lighting his pipe, compounded between his patrician dignity and his love of agricultural gossip, by walking up and down while he conversed with his guest.

"I passed another drove," said the squire, "with one of your countrymen behind them—they were something less beasts than your drove, doddies most of them—a big man was with them—none of your kilts though, but a decent pair of breeches. D'ye know who he may be?"

"Hout aye—that might, could, and would be Hughie Morrison—I didna think he could hae peen sae weel up. He has made a day on us; but his Argyleshires will have wearied shanks. How far was he behind?"

"I think about six or seven miles," answered the

squire, "for I passed them at the Christenbury Crag, and I overtook you at the Hollan Bush. If his beasts be leg-weary, he will be maybe selling bargains."

"Na, na, Hughie Morrison is no the man for par-gains—ye maun come to some Highland body like Robin Oig hersell for the like of these—put I maun pe wishing you goot night, and twenty of them let alane ane, and I maun down to the Clachan to see if the lad Harry Waakfelt is out of his humdudgeons yet."

The party at the ale-house were still in full talk, and the treachery of Robin Oig still the theme of conversation, when the supposed culprit entered the apartment. His arrival, as usually happens in such a case, put an instant stop to the discussion of which he had furnished the subject, and he was received by the company assembled with that chilling silence which, more than a thousand exclamations, tells an intruder that he is unwelcome. Surprised and offended, but not appalled by the reception which he experienced, Robin entered with an undaunted and even a haughty air, attempted no greeting as he saw he was received with none, and placed himself by the side of the fire, a little apart from a table at which Harry Wakefield, the bailiff, and two or three other persons, were seated. The ample Cumbrian kitchen would have afforded plenty of room, even for a larger separation.

Robin, thus seated, proceeded to light his pipe, and call for a pint of twopenny.

"We have no twopence ale," answered Ralph Heskett, the landlord; "but as thou find'st thy own tobacco, it's like thou may'st find thy own liquor

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too—it's the wont of thy country, I wot."

"Shame, goodman," said the landlady, a blithe bustling house-wife, hastening herself to supply the guest with liquor. "Thou knowest well enow what the strange man wants, and it's thy trade to be civil, man. Thou shouldst know, that if the Scot likes a small pot, he pays a sure penny."

Without taking any notice of this nuptial dialogue, the Highlander took the flagon in his hand, and addressing the company generally, drank the interesting toast of "Good markets," to the party assembled.

"The better that the wind blew fewer dealers from the north," said one of the farmers, "and fewer Highland runts to eat up the English meadows."

"Saul of my pody, put you are wrang there, my friend," answered Robin, with composure; "it is your fat Englishmen that eat up our Scots cattle, puir things."

"I wish there was a summat to eat up their drovers," said another; "a plain Englishman canna make bread within a kenning of them."

"Or an honest servant keep his master's favour, but they will come sliding in between him and the sunshine," said the bailiff.

"If these pe jokes," said Robin Oig with the same composure, "there is ower mony jokes upon one man."

"It is no joke, but downright earnest," said the bailiff. "Harkye, Mr. Robin Ogg, or whatever is your name, it's right we should tell you that we are all of one opinion, and that is, that you, Mr. Robin Ogg, have behaved to our friend Mr. Harry Wakefield here, like a raff and a blackguard."

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"Nae doubt, nae doubt," answered Robin, with great composure; "and you are a set of very pretty judges, for whose prains or pehaviour I was not gie a pinch of sneeshing. If Mr. Harry Waakfelt kens where he is wranged, he kens where he may be righted."

"He speaks truth," said Wakefield, who had listened to what passed, divided between the offence which he had taken at Robin's late behaviour, and the revival of his habitual feelings of regard.

He now arose, and went towards Robin, who got up from his seat as he approached, and held out his hand.

"That's right, Harry—go it—serve him out," resounded on all sides—"tip him the nailer—show him the mill."

"Hold your peace all of you, and be——," said Wakefield; and then addressing his comrade, he took him by the extended hand, with something alike of respect and defiance. "Robin," he said, "thou hast used me ill enough this day; but if you mean, like a frank fellow, to shake hands, and make a tussle for love on the sod, why I'll forgie thee, man, and we shall be better friends than ever."

"And would it not pe petter to pe cood friends without more of the matter?" said Robin; "we will be much petter friendships with our panes hale than proken."

Harry Wakefield dropped the hand of his friend, or rather threw it from him.

"I did not think I had been keeping company for three years with a coward."

"Coward pelongs to none of my name," said

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Robin, whose eyes began to kindle, but keeping the command of his temper. "It was no coward's legs or hands, Harry Waakfelt, that drew you out of the fords of Frew, when you was drifting ower the plack rock, and every eel in the river expected his share of you."

"And that is true enough, too," said the Englishman, struck by the appeal.

"Adzooks!" exclaimed the bailiff—"sure Harry Wakefield, the nattiest lad at Whitson Tryste, Wooler Fair, Carlisle Sands, or Stagshaw Bank, is not going to show the white feather? Ah, this comes of living so long with kilts and bonnets—men forget the use of their daddles."

"I may teach you, Master Fleecebumpkin, that I have not lost the use of mine," said Wakefield, and then went on. "This will never do, Robin. We must have a turn-up, or we shall be the talk of the countryside. I'll be d——d if I hurt thee—I'll put on the gloves gin thou like. Come, stand forward like a man."

"To pe peaten like a dog," said Robin; "is there any reason in that? If you think I have done you wrong, I'll go before your shudge, though I neither know his law nor his language."

A general cry of "No, no—no law, no lawyer! a bellyful and be friends," was echoed by the bystanders.

"But," continued Robin, "if I am to fight, I've no skill to fight like a jackanapes, with hands and nails."

"How would you fight, then?" said his antagonist; "though I am thinking it would be hard to bring you

to the scratch anyhow."

"I would fight with broadswords, and sink point on the first blood drawn—like a gentlemans."

A loud shout of laughter followed the proposal, which indeed had rather escaped from poor Robin's swelling heart, than been the dictate of his sober judgment.

"Gentleman, quotha!" was echoed on all sides, with a shout of unextinguishable laughter; "a very pretty gentleman, God wot. Canst get two swords for the gentlemen to fight with, Ralph Heskett?"

"No, but I can send to the armoury at Carlisle, and lend them two forks, to be making shift with in the meantime."

"Tush, man," said another, "the bonny Scots come into the world with the blue bonnet on their heads, and dirk and pistol at their belt."

"Best send post," said Mr. Fleecebumpkin, "to the squire of Corby Castle, to come and stand second to the *gentleman*."

In the midst of this torrent of general ridicule, the Highlander instinctively griped beneath the folds of his plaid.

"But it's better not," he said in his own language. "A hundred curses on the swine-eaters, who know neither decency nor civility!"

"Make room, the pack of you," he said, advancing to the door.

But his former friend interposed his sturdy bulk, and opposed his leaving the house; and when Robin Oig attempted to make his way by force, he hit him down on the floor, with as much ease as a boy bowls down a nine-pin.

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"A ring, a ring!" was now shouted, until the dark rafters, and the hams that hung on them, trembled again, and the very platters on the *bink* clattered against each other. "Well done, Harry." "Give it him home, Harry." "Take care of him now—he sees his own blood!"

Such were the exclamations, while the Highlander, starting from the ground, all his coldness and caution lost in frantic rage, sprang at his antagonist with the fury, the activity, and the vindictive purpose of an incensed tiger-cat. But when could rage encounter science and temper? Robin Oig again went down in the unequal contest; and as the blow was necessarily a severe one, he lay motionless on the floor of the kitchen. The landlady ran to offer some aid, but Mr. Fleecebumpkin would not permit her to approach.

"Let him alone," he said, "he will come to within time, and come up to scratch again. He has not got half his broth yet."

"He has got all I mean to give him, though," said his antagonist, whose heart began to relent towards his old associate; "and I would rather by half give the rest to yourself, Mr. Fleecebumpkin, for you pretend to know a thing or two, and Robin had not art enough even to peel before setting to, but fought with his plaid dangling about him. Stand up, Robin, my man! all friends now; and let me hear the man that will speak a word against you, or your country, for your sake."

Robin Oig was still under the dominion of his passion, and eager to renew the onset; but being withheld on the one side by the peace-making Dame

Heskett, and on the other, aware that Wakefield no longer meant to renew the combat, his fury sank into gloomy sullenness.

"Come, come, never grudge so much at it, man," said the brave-spirited Englishman, with the placability of his country, "shake hands, and we will be better friends than ever."

"Friends!" exclaimed Robin Oig, with strong emphasis—"friends! Never. Look to yourself, Harry Waakfelt."

"Then the curse of Cromwell on your proud Scots stomach, as the man says in the play, and you may do your worst, and be d——d; for one man can say nothing more to another after a tussle, than that he is sorry for it."

On these terms the friends parted; Robin Oig drew out, in silence, a piece of money, threw it on the table, and then left the ale-house. But turning at the door, he shook his hand at Wakefield, pointing with his forefinger upwards, in a manner which might imply either a threat or a caution. He then disappeared in the moonlight.

Some words passed after his departure, between the bailiff, who piqued himself on being a little of a bully, and Harry Wakefield, who, with generous inconsistency, was now not indisposed to begin a new combat in defence of Robin Oig's reputation, "although he could not use his daddles like an Englishman, as it did not come natural to him." But Dame Heskett prevented this second quarrel from coming to a head by her peremptory interference. "There should be no more fighting in her house," she said; "there had been too much already. And you, Mr.

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Wakefield, may live to learn," she added, "what it is to make a deadly enemy out of a good friend."

"Pshaw, dame! Robin Oig is an honest fellow, and will never keep malice."

"Do not trust to that—you do not know the dour temper of the Scots, though you have dealt with them so often. I have a right to know them, my mother being a Scot."

"And so is well seen on her daughter," said Ralph Heskett.

This nuptial sarcasm gave the discourse another turn; fresh customers entered the tap-room or kitchen, and others left it. The conversation turned on the expected markets, and the report of prices from different parts both of Scotland and England—treaties were commenced, and Harry Wakefield was lucky enough to find a chap for a part of his drove, and at a very considerable profit; an event of consequence more than sufficient to blot out all remembrances of the unpleasant scuffle in the earlier part of the day. But there remained one party from whose mind that recollection could not have been wiped away by the possession of every head of cattle betwixt Esk and Eden.

This was Robin Oig M'Combich. "That I should have had no weapon," he said, "and for the first time in my life! Blighted be the tongue that bids the Highlander part with the dirk—the dirk—ha! the English blood—My Muhme's words—when did her word fall to the ground?"

The recollection of the fatal prophecy confirmed the deadly intention which instantly sprang up in his mind.

“Ha! Morrison cannot be many miles behind; and if it were a hundred, what then?”

His impetuous spirit had now a fixed purpose and motive of action, and he turned the light foot of his country towards the wilds, through which he knew, by Mr. Ireby’s report, that Morrison was advancing. *His mind was wholly engrossed by the sense of injury*—injury sustained from a friend; and by the desire of vengeance on one whom he now accounted his most bitter enemy. The treasured ideas of self-importance and self-opinion—of ideal birth and quality, had become more precious to him, like the hoard to the miser, because he could only enjoy them in secret. But that hoard was pillaged, the idols which he had secretly worshipped had been desecrated and profaned. Insulted, abused, and beaten, he was no longer worthy, in his own opinion, of the name he bore, or the lineage which he belonged to—nothing was left to him—nothing but revenge; and, as the reflection added a galling spur to every step, he determined it should be as sudden and signal as the offence.

When Robin Oig left the door of the ale-house, seven or eight English miles at least lay betwixt Morrison and him. The advance of the former was slow, limited by the sluggish pace of his cattle; the last left behind him stubble-field and hedge-row, crag and dark heath, all glittering with frost-rime in the broad November moonlight, at the rate of six miles an hour. And now the distant lowing of Morrison’s cattle is heard; and now they are seen creeping like moles in size and slowness of motion on the broad face of the moor; and now he meets them—passes

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them, and stops their conductor.

"May good betide us," said the Southlander. "Is this you, Robin M'Combich, or your wraith?"

"It is Robin Oig M'Combich," answered the Highlander, "and it is not. But never mind that, put pe giving me the skene-dhu."

"What! you are for back to the Highlands. The devil! Have you selt all off before the fair? This beats all for quick markets!"

"I have not sold—I am not going north. May pe I will never go north again. Give me pack my dirk, Hugh Morrison, or there will pe words petween us."

"Indeed, Robin, I'll be better advised before I gie it back to you—it is a wanchancy weapon in a Highlandman's hand, and I am thinking you will be about some barns-breaking."

"Pruitt, trutt! let me have my weapon," said Robin Oig impatiently.

"Hooly, and fairly," said his well-meaning friend. "I'll tell you what will do better than these dirking doings. Ye ken Highlander, and Lowlander, and Border-men, are a' ae man's bairns when you are over the Scots dyke. See, the Eskdale callants, and fighting Charlie of Liddesdale, and the Lockerby lads, and the four Dandies of Lustruther, and a wheen mair grey plaids, are coming up behind, and if you are wranged, there is the hand of a Manly Morrison, we'll see you righted, if Carlisle and Stanwix baith took up the feud."

"To tell you the truth," said Robin Oig, desirous of eluding the suspicions of his friend, "I have enlisted with a party of the Black Watch, and must march off to-morrow morning."

“Enlisted! Were you mad or drunk? You must buy yourself off. I can lend you twenty notes, and twenty to that, if the drove sell.”

“I thank you—thank ye, Hughie; but I go with good will the gate that I am going—so the dirk—the dirk!”

“There it is for you then, since less wunna serve. But think on what I was saying. Waes me, it will be sair news in the braes of Balquidder, that Robin Oig M‘Combich should have run an ill gate, and ta’en on.”

“Ill news in Balquidder, indeed!” echoed poor Robin. “But Cot speed you, Hughie, and send you good marcats. Ye winna meet with Robin Oig again, either at tryste or fair.”

So saying, he shook hastily the hand of his acquaintance, and set out in the direction from which he had advanced, with the spirit of his former pace.

“There is something wrang with the lad,” muttered the Morrison to himself, “but we’ll maybe see better into it the morn’s morn’ing.”

But long ere the morning dawned, the catastrophe of our tale had taken place. It was two hours after the affray had happened, and it was totally forgotten by almost everyone, when Robin Oig returned to Heskett’s inn. The place was filled at once by various sorts of men, and with noises corresponding to their character. There were the grave low sounds of men engaged in busy traffic, with the laugh, the song, and the riotous jest of those who had nothing to do but to enjoy themselves. Among the last was Harry Wakefield, who, amidst a grinning group of smock-frocks, hobnailed shoes, and jolly English physiognomies,

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was trolling forth the old ditty:

What though my name be Roger,
Who drives the plough and cart—

when he was interrupted by a well-known voice saying in a high and stern tone, marked by the sharp Highland accent, "Harry Waakfelt—if you be a man, stand up!"

"What is the matter?—what is it?" the guests demanded of each other.

"It is only a d——d Scotsman," said Fleece-bumpkin, who was by this time very drunk, "whom Harry Wakefield helped to his broth the day, who is now come to have *his cauld kail* het again."

"Harry Waakfelt," repeated the same ominous summons, "stand up, if you be a man!"

There is something in the tone of deep and concentrated passion, which attracts attention and imposes awe, even by the very sound. The guests shrank back on every side, and gazed at the Highlander as he stood in the middle of them, his brows bent, and his features rigid with resolution.

"I will stand up with all my heart, Robin, my boy, but it shall be to shake hands with you, and drink down all unkindness. It is not the fault of your heart, man, that you don't know how to clench your hands."

But this time he stood opposite to his antagonist; his open and unsuspecting look strangely contrasted with the stern purpose, which gleamed wild, dark, and vindictive in the eyes of the Highlander.

"'Tis not thy fault, man, that, not having the luck to be an Englishman, thou canst not fight more than a schoolgirl."

"I *can* fight," answered Robin Oig sternly, but calmly, "and you shall know it. You, Harry Waakfelt, showed me to-day how the Saxon churls fight—I show you now how the Highland Dunniè-wassel fights."

He seconded the word with the action, and plunged the dagger, which he suddenly displayed, into the broad breast of the English yeoman, with such fatal certainty and force, that the hilt made a hollow sound against the breast-bone, and the double-edged point split the very heart of his victim. Harry Wakefield fell and expired with a single groan. His assassin next seized the bailiff by the collar, and offered the bloody poniard to this throat, whilst dread and surprise rendered the man incapable of defence.

"It were very just to lay you beside him," he said, "but the blood of a base pickthank shall never mix on my father's dirk with that of a brave man."

As he spoke, he cast the man from him with so much force that he fell on the floor, while Robin, with his other hand, threw the fatal weapon into the blazing turf-fire.

"There," he said, "take me who likes—and let fire cleanse blood if it can."

The pause of astonishment still continuing, Robin Oig asked for a peace-officer, and a constable having stepped out, he surrendered himself to his custody.

"A bloody night's work you have made of it," said the constable.

"Your own fault," said the Highlander. "Had you kept his hands off me twa hours since, he would have been now as well and merry as he was twa minutes since."

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"It must be sorely answered," said the peace-officer.

"Never you mind that—death pays all debts; it will pay that too."

The horror of the bystanders began now to give way to indignation; and the sight of a favourite companion murdered in the midst of them, the provocation being, in their opinion, so utterly inadequate to the excess of vengeance, might have induced them to kill the perpetrator of the deed even upon the very spot. The constable, however, did his duty on this occasion, and with the assistance of some of the more reasonable persons present, procured horses to guard the prisoner to Carlisle, to abide his doom at the next assizes. While the escort was preparing, the prisoner neither expressed the least interest nor attempted the slightest reply. Only, before he was carried from the fatal apartment, he desired to look at the dead body, which, raised from the floor, had been deposited upon the large table (at the head of which Harry Wakefield had presided but a few minutes before, full of life, vigour, and animation) until the surgeons should examine the mortal wound. The face of the corpse was decently covered with a napkin. To the surprise and horror of the bystanders, which displayed itself in a general *Ah!* drawn through clenched teeth and half-shut lips, Robin Oig removed the cloth, and gazed with a mournful but steady eye on the lifeless visage, which had been so lately animated, that the smile of good-humoured confidence in his own strength, of conciliation at once and contempt towards his enemy, still curled his lip. While those present expected that the wound, which had so

lately flooded the apartment with gore, would send forth fresh streams at the touch of the homicide, Robin Oig replaced the covering, with the brief exclamation—"He was a pretty man!"

My story is nearly ended. The unfortunate Highlander stood his trial at Carlisle. I was myself present, and as a young Scottish lawyer, or barrister at least, and reputed a man of some quality, the politeness of the Sheriff of Cumberland offered me a place on the bench. The facts of the case were proved in the manner I have related them; and whatever might be at first the prejudice of the audience against a crime so un-English as that of assassination from revenge, yet when the rooted national prejudices of the prisoner had been explained, which made him consider himself as stained with indelible dishonour when subjected to personal violence; when his previous patience, moderation, and endurance were considered, the generosity of the English audience was inclined to regard his crime as the wayward aberration of a false idea of honour rather than as flowing from a heart naturally savage, or perverted by habitual vice. I shall never forget the charge of the venerable judge to the jury, although not at that time liable to be much affected either by that which was eloquent or pathetic.

"We have had," he said, "in the previous part of our duty" (alluding to some former trials) "to discuss crimes which infer disgust and abhorrence, while they call down the well-merited vengeance of the law. It is now our still more melancholy task to apply its salutary though severe enactments to a case of a very singular character, in which the crime (for a

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crime it is, and a deep one) arose less out of the malevolence of the heart, than the error of the understanding—less from any idea of committing wrong, than from an unhappily perverted notion of that which is right. Here we have two men, highly esteemed, it has been stated, in their rank of life, and attached, it seems, to each other as friends, one of whose lives has been already sacrificed to a punctilio, and the other is about to prove the vengeance of the offended laws; and yet both may claim our commiseration at least, as men acting in ignorance of each other's national prejudices, and unhappily misguided rather than voluntarily erring from the path of right conduct.

“In the original cause of the misunderstanding, we must in justice give the right to the prisoner at the bar. He had acquired possession of the enclosure, which was the object of competition, by a legal contract with the proprietor, Mr. Ireby; and yet, when accosted with reproaches undeserved in themselves, and galling doubtless to a temper at least sufficiently susceptible of passion, he offered notwithstanding to yield up half his acquisition for the sake of peace and good neighbourhood, and his amicable proposal was rejected with scorn. Then follows the scene at Mr. Heskett the publican's, and you will observe how the stranger was treated by the deceased, and, I am sorry to observe, by those around, who seem to have urged him in a manner which was aggravating in the highest degree. While he asked for peace and for composition, and offered submission to a magistrate, or to a mutual arbiter, the prisoner was insulted by a whole company, who seem on this occasion to have

forgotten the national maxim of "fair play"; and while attempting to escape from the place in peace, he was intercepted, struck down, and beaten to the effusion of his blood.

"Gentlemen of the jury, it was with some impatience that I heard my learned brother, who opened the case for the crown, give an unfavourable turn to the prisoner's conduct on this occasion. He said the prisoner was afraid to encounter his antagonist in fair fight, or to submit to the laws of the ring; and that therefore, like a cowardly Italian, he had recourse to his fatal stiletto, to murder the man whom he dared not meet in manly encounter. I observed the prisoner shrink from this part of the accusation with the abhorrence natural to a brave man; and as I would wish to make my words impressive when I point his real crime, I must secure his opinion of my impartiality, by rebutting everything that seems to me a false accusation. There can be no doubt that the prisoner is a man of resolution—too much resolution—I wish to Heaven that he had less, or rather that he had had a better education to regulate it.

"Gentlemen, as to the laws my brother talks of, they may be known in the bull-ring, or the bear-garden, or the cockpit, but they are not known here. Or, if they should be so far admitted as furnishing a species of proof that no malice was intended in this sort of combat, from which fatal accidents do sometimes arise, it can only be so admitted when both parties are *in pari casu*, equally acquainted with, and equally willing to refer themselves to, that species of arbitrement. But will it be contended that a man of

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superior rank and education is to be subjected, or is obliged to subject himself, to this coarse and brutal strife, perhaps in opposition to a younger, stronger, or more skilful opponent? Certainly even the pugilistic code, if founded upon the fair play of Merry Old England, as my brother alleges it to be, can contain nothing so preposterous. And, gentlemen of the jury, if the laws would support an English gentleman, wearing, we will suppose, his sword, in defending himself by force against a violent personal aggression of the nature offered to this prisoner, they will not less protect a foreigner and a stranger, involved in the same unpleasing circumstances. If, therefore, gentlemen of the jury, when thus pressed by a *vis major*, the object of obloquy to a whole company, and of direct violence from one at least, and, as he might reasonably apprehend, from more, the panel had produced the weapon which his countrymen, as we are informed, generally carry about their persons, and the same unhappy circumstance had ensued which you have heard detailed in evidence, I could not in my conscience have asked from you a verdict of murder. The prisoner's personal defence might, indeed, even in that case, have gone more or less beyond the *Moderamen inculpatae tutelae*, spoken of by lawyers, but the punishment incurred would have been that of manslaughter, not of murder. I beg leave to add that I should have thought this milder species of charge was demanded in the case supposed, notwithstanding the statute of James I, cap. 8, which takes the case of slaughter by stabbing with a short weapon, even without malice prepense, out of the benefit of clergy. For this statute of stabbing, as

it is termed, arose out of a temporary cause; and as the real guilt is the same, whether the slaughter be committed by the dagger, or by the sword or pistol, the benignity of the modern law places them all on the same, or nearly the same footing.

“But, gentlemen of the jury, the pinch of the case lies in the interval of two hours interposed betwixt the reception of the injury and the fatal retaliation. In the heat of affray and *chaude mêlée*, law, compassionating the infirmities of humanity, makes allowance for the passions which rule such a stormy moment—for the sense of present pain, for the apprehension of further injury, for the difficulty of ascertaining with due accuracy the precise degree of violence which is necessary to protect the person of the individual, without annoying or injuring the assailant more than is absolutely requisite. But the time necessary to walk twelve miles, however speedily performed, was an interval sufficient for the prisoner to have recollected himself; and the violence with which he carried his purpose into effect, with so many circumstances of deliberate determination, could neither be induced by the passion of anger, nor that of fear. It was the purpose and the act of predetermined revenge, for which law neither can, will, nor ought to have sympathy or allowance.

“It is true, we may repeat to ourselves, in alleviation of this poor man’s unhappy action, that his case is a very peculiar one. The country which he inhabits was, in the days of many now alive, inaccessible to the laws, not only of England, which have not even yet penetrated thither, but to those to which our neighbours of Scotland are subjected, and which

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must be supposed to be, and no doubt actually are, founded upon the general principles of justice and equity which pervade every civilized country. Amongst their mountains, as among the North American Indians, the various tribes were wont to make war upon each other, so that each man was obliged to go armed for his own protection. These men, from the ideas which they entertained of their own descent and of their own consequence, regarded themselves as so many cavaliers or men-at-arms, rather than as the peasantry of a peaceful country. Those laws of the ring, as my brother terms them, were unknown to the race of warlike mountaineers; that decision of quarrels by no other weapons than those which nature has given every man, must to them have seemed as vulgar and as preposterous as to the noblesse of France. Revenge, on the other hand, must have been as familiar to their habits of society as to those of the Cherokees or Mohawks. It is indeed, as described by Bacon, at bottom a kind of wild untutored justice; for the fear of retaliation must withhold the hands of the oppressor where there is no regular law to check daring violence. But though all this may be granted, and though we may allow that, such having been the case of the Highlands in the days of the prisoner's fathers, many of the opinions and sentiments must still continue to influence the present generation, it cannot, and ought not, even in this most painful case, to alter the administration of the law, either in your hands, gentlemen of the jury, or in mine. The first object of civilization is to place the general protection of the law, equally administered, in the room of that wild justice, which every man cut and carved for himself,

according to the length of his sword and the strength of his arm. The law says to the subjects, with a voice only inferior to that of the Deity, 'Vengeance is mine'. The instant that there is time for passion to cool, and reason to interpose, an injured party must become aware that the law assumes the exclusive cognizance of the right and wrong betwixt the parties, and opposes her inviolable buckler to every attempt of the private party to right himself. I repeat, that this unhappy man ought personally to be the object rather of our pity than our abhorrence, for he failed in his ignorance, and from mistaken notions of honour. But his crime is not the less that of murder, gentlemen, and, in your high and important office, it is your duty so to find. Englishmen have their angry passions as well as Scots; and should this man's action remain unpunished, you may unsheath, under various pretences, a thousand daggers betwixt the Land's-end and the Orkneys."

The venerable judge thus ended what, to judge by his apparent emotion, and by the tears which filled his eyes, was really a painful task. The jury, according to his instructions, brought in a verdict of Guilty; and Robin Oig M'Combich, *alias* M'Gregor, was sentenced to death and left for execution, which took place accordingly. He met his fate with great firmness, and acknowledged the justice of his sentence. But he repelled indignantly the observations of those who accused him of attacking an unarmed man. "I give a life for the life I took," he said, "and what can I do more?"

BY
SIR WALTER SCOTT



WANDERING WILLIE'S TALE

YE MAUN have heard of Sir Robert Redgauntlet of that Ilk, who lived in these parts before the dear years. The country will lang mind him; and our fathers used to draw breath thick if ever they heard him named. He was out wi' the Hielandmen in Montrose's time; and again he was in the hills wi' Glencairn in the saxteen hundred and fifty-twa; and sae when King Charles the Second came in, wha was in sic favour as the Laird of Redgauntlet? He was knighted at Lonon court, wi' the king's ain sword; and being a red-hot prelatist, he came down here, rampaung like a lion, with commissions of lieutenancy (and of lunaacy, for what I ken) to put down a' the Whigs and Covenanters in the country. Wild wark they made of it; for the Whigs were as dour as the Cavaliers were fierce, and it was which should first tire the' other. Redgauntlet was ay for the strong hand; and his name is kend as wide in the country as Claverhouse's or Tam Dalyell's. Glen, nor dargle, nor mountain, nor cave, could hide the puir hill-folk when Redgauntlet was out with bugle and bloodhound after them, as if they had been sae mony deer. And troth when they fand them, they

didna mak muckle mair ceremony than a Hieland-man wi' a roebuck—it was just, “Will ye tak the test?”—if not, “Make ready—present—fire!”—and there lay the recusant.

Far and wide was Sir Robert hated and feared. Men thought he had a direct compact with Satan—that he was proof against steel—and that bullets happed aff his buff-coat like hailstones from a hearth—that he had a mear that would turn a hare on the side of Carrifra-gawns¹—and muckle to the same purpose, of whilk mair anon. The best blessing they wared on him was, “Deil scowp wi' Redgauntlet!” He wasna a bad master to his ain folk, though, and was weel aneugh liked by his tenants; and as for the lackies and troopers that raid out wi' him to the persecutions, as the Whigs caa'd those killing times, they wad hae drunken themsells blind to his health at any time.

Now you are to ken that my gudesire lived on Redgauntlet's grund—they ca' the place Primrose Knowe. We had lived on the grund, and under the Redgauntlets, since the riding days, and lang before. It was a pleasant bit; and I think the air is callerer and fresher there than onywhere else in the country. It 's a' deserted now; and I sat on the broken door-cheek three days since, and was glad I couldna see the plight the place was in; but that 's a' wide o' the mark. There dwelt my gudesire, Steenie Steenson, a rambling, rattling chiel' he had been in his young days, and could play weel on the pipes; he was famous at “Hoopers and Girders”—a' Cumberland couldna touch him at “Jockie Lattin”—and he had

¹ A precipitous side of a mountain in Moffatdale.

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the finest finger for the back-lilt between Berwick and Carlisle. The like o' Steenie wasna the sort that they made Whigs o'. And so he became a Tory, as they ca' it, which we now ca' Jacobites, just out of a kind of needcessity, that he might belang to some side or other. He had nae ill will to the Whig bodies, and liked little to see the blude rin, though, being obliged to follow Sir Robert in hunting and hoisting, watching and warding, he saw muckle mischief, and maybe did some, that he couldna avoid.

Now Steenie was a kind of favourite with his master, and kend a' the folks about the castle, and was often sent for to play the pipes when they were at their merriment. Auld Dougal MacCallum, the butler, that had followed Sir Robert through gude and ill, thick and thin, pool and stream, was specially fond of the pipes, an ay gae my gudesire his gude word wi' the laird; for Dougal could turn his master round his finger.

Weel, round came the Revolution, and it had like to have broken the hearts baith of Dougal and his master. But the change was not a'thegether sae great as they feared, and other folk thought for. The Whigs made an unco crawling what they wad do with their auld enemies, and in special wi' Sir Robert Redgauntlet. But there were ower mony great folks dipped in the same doings, to mak a spick and span new warld. So Parliament passed it a' ower easy; and Sir Robert, bating that he was held to hunting foxes instead of Covenanters, remained just the man he was.¹ His revel was as loud, and his hall as weel

¹ The caution and moderation of King William III, and his principles of unlimited toleration, deprived the Cameronians of the

lighted, as ever it had been, though maybe he lacked the fines of the nonconformists, that used to come to stock his larder and cellar; for it is certain he began to be keener about the rents than his tenants used to find him before, and they behoved to be prompt to the rent-day, or else the laird wasna pleased. And he was sic an awsome body, that naebody cared to anger him; for the oaths he swore, and the rage that he used to get into, and the looks that he put on, made men sometimes think him a devil incarnate.

Weel, my gudesire was nae manager—no that he was a very great misguider—but he hadna the saving gift, and he got twa terms' rent in arrear. He got the first brash at Whitsunday put ower wi' fair word and piping; but when Martinmas came, there was a summons from the grund-officer to come wi' the rent on a day preceese, or else Steenie behoved to flit. Sair wark he had to get the siller; but he was weel-freended, and at last he got the haill scraped thegither—a thousand merks—the maist of it was from a neighbour they ca'd Laurie Lapraik—a sly tod. Laurie had walth o' gear—could hunt wi' the hound and rin wi' the hare—and be Whig or Tory, saunt or sinner, as the wind stood. He was a professor in this Revolution warld, but he liked an orra sough of this warld, and a tune on the pipes weel aneugh at a bytime; and abune a', he thought he had gude

opportunity they ardently desired, to retaliate the injuries which they had received during the reign of prelacy, and purify the land, as they called it, from the pollution of blood. They esteemed the Revolution, therefore, only a half measure, which neither comprehended the rebuilding the Kirk in its full splendour, nor the revenge of the death of the Saints on their persecutors.

security for the siller he lent my gudesire ower the stocking at Primrose Knowe.

Away trots my gudesire to Redgauntlet Castle wi' a heavy purse and a light heart, glad to be out of the laird's danger. Weel, the first thing he learned at the castle was, that Sir Robert had fretted himsell into a fit of the gout, because he did not appear before twelve o'clock. It wasna a'thegether for sake of the money, Dougal thought; but because he didna like to part wi' my gudesire aff the grund. Dougal was glad to see Steenie, and brought him into the great oak parlour, and there sat the laird his leesome lane, excepting that he had beside him a great, ill-favoured jackanape, that was a special pet of his; a cankered beast it was, and mony an ill-natured trick it played—ill to please it was, and easily angered—ran about the haill castle, chattering and yowling, and pinching, and biting folk, specially before ill weather, or disturbances in the state. Sir Robert caa'd it Major Weir, after the warlock that was burnt;¹ and few folk liked either the name or the conditions of the creature—they thought there was something in it by ordinar—and my gudesire was not just easy in mind when the door shut on him, and he saw himself in the room wi' naebody but the laird, Dougal Mac Callum, and the major, a thing that hadna chanced to him before.

Sir Robert sat, or, I should say, lay, in a great armed chair, wi' his grand velvet gown, and his feet on a cradle; for he had baith gout and gravel, and his face looked as gash and ghastly as Satan's. Major

¹ A celebrated wizzard, executed at Edinburgh for sorcery and other crimes.

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Weir sat opposite him, in a red laced coat, and the laird's wig on his head; and ay as Sir Robert girmed wi' pain, the jackanape girmed too, like a sheep's-head between a pair of tangs—an ill-faur'd, fearsome couple they were. The laird's buff-coat was hung on a pin behind him, and his broadsword and his pistols *within reach; for he keepit up the auld fashion of having the weapons ready, and a horse saddled day and night, just as he used to do when he was able to loup on horseback, and away after ony of the hill-folk he could get speerings of.* Some said it was for fear of the Whigs taking vengeance, but I judge it was just his auld custom—he wasna gien to fear onything. The rental-book, wi' its black cover and brass clasps, was lying beside him; and a book of sculduddry sangs was put betwixt the leaves, to keep it open at the place where it bore evidence against the Goodman of Primrose Knowe, as behind the hand with his mails and duties. Sir Robert gave my gudesire a look, as if he would have withered his heart in his bosom. Ye maun ken he had a way of bending his brows, that men saw the visible mark of a horseshoe in his forehead, deep dinted, as if it had been stamped there.

“Are ye come light-handed, ye son of a toom whistle?” said Sir Robert. “Zounds! if you are——”

My gudesire, with as gude a countenance as he could put on, made a leg, and placed the bag of money on the table wi' a dash, like a man that does something clever. The laird drew it to him hastily—“Is it all here, Steenie, man?”

“Your honour will find it right,” said my gudesire.

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"Here, Dougal," said the laird, "gie Steenie a tass of brandy downstairs, till I count the siller and write the receipt."

But they werena weel out of the room, when Sir Robert gied a yelloch that garr'd the castle rock. Back ran Dougal—in flew the livery-men—yell on yell gied the laird, ilk ane mair awfu' than the ither. *My gudesire knew not whether to stand or flee*, but he ventured back into the parlour, where a' was gaun hirdy-girdie—naebody to say "come in", or "gae out." Terribly the laird roared for cauld water to his feet, and wine to cool his throat; and Hell, hell, hell, and its flames, was ay the word in his mouth. They brought him water, and when they plunged his swollen feet into the tub, he cried out it was burning; and folk say that it *did* bubble and sparkle like a seething cauldron. He flung the cup at Dougal's head, and said he had given him blood instead of burgundy; and, sure aneugh, the lass washed clotted blood aff the carpet the neist day. The jackanape they caa'd Major Weir, it jibbered and cried as if it was mocking its master; my gudesire's head was like to turn—he forgot baith siller and receipt, and downstairs he banged; but as he ran, the shrieks came faint and fainter; there was a deep-drawn shivering groan, and word gaed through the castle that the laird was dead.

Weel, away came my gudesire, wi' his finger in his mouth, and his best hope was that Dougal had seen the money-bag, and heard the laird speak of writing the receipt. The young laird, now Sir John, came from Edinburgh, to see things put to rights. Sir John and his father never gree'd weel. Sir John

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had been bred an advocate, and afterwards sat in the last Scots Parliament and voted for the Union, having gotten, it was thought, a rug of the compensations—if his father could have come out of his grave, he would have brained him for it on his awn hearthstane. Some thought it was easier counting with the auld rough knight than the fair-spoken young ane—but mair of that anon.

Dougal MacCallum, poor body, neither grat nor grained, but gaed about the house looking like a corpse, but directing, as was his duty, a' the order of the grand funeral. Now, Dougal looked ay waur and waur when night was coming, and was ay the last to gang to his bed, whilk was in a little round just opposite the chamber of dais, whilk his master occupied while he was living, and where he now lay in state, as they caa'd it, weel-a-day! The night before the funeral, Dougal could keep his awn counsel nae langer; he came doun with his proud spirit, and fairly asked auld Hutcheon to sit in his room with him for an hour. When they were in the round, Dougal took ae tass of brandy to himsell, and gave another to Hutcheon, and wished him all health and lang life, and said that, for himsell, he wasna lang for this world; for that, every night since Sir Robert's death, his silver call had sounded from the state chamber, just as it used to do at nights in his lifetime, to call Dougal to help to turn him in his bed. Dougal said that being alone with the dead on that floor of the tower (for naebody cared to wake Sir Robert Redgauntlet like another corpse) he had never daured to answer the call, but that now his conscience checked him for neglecting his duty; for, "though

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death breaks service," said MacCallum, "'it shall never break my service to Sir Robert; and I will answer his next whistle, so be you will stand by me, Hutcheon."

Hutcheon had nae will to the wark, but he had stood by Dougal in battle and broil, and he wad not fail him at this pinch; so down the carles sat ower a stoup of brandy, and Hutcheon, who was something of a clerk, would have read a chapter of the Bible; but Dougal would hear naething but a blaud of Davie Lindsay, whilk was the waur preparation.

When midnight came, and the house was quiet as the grave, sure enough the silver whistle sounded as sharp and shrill as if Sir Robert was blowing it, and up got the twa auld serving-men, and tottered into the room where the dead man lay. Hutcheon saw aneugh at the first glance; for there were torches in the room, which showed him the foul fiend, in his ain shape, sitting on the laird's coffin! Ower he cowed as if he had been dead. He could not tell how lang^e he lay in a trance at the door, but when he gathered himself, he cried on his neighbour, and getting nae answer, raised the house, when Dougal was found lying dead within twa steps of the bed where his master's coffin was placed. As for the whistle, it was gaen anes and ay; but mony a time was it heard at the top of the house on the bartizan, and amang the auld chimneys and turrets where the howlets have their nests. Sir John hushed the matter up, and the funeral passed over without mair bogle-wark.

But when a' was ower, and the laird was beginning to settle his affairs, every tenant was called up for his arrears, and my gudesire for the full sum that stood

against him in the rental-book. Weel, away he trots to the castle, to tell his story, and there he is introduced to Sir John, sitting in his father's chair, in deep mourning, with weepers and hanging cravat, and a small walking rapier by his side, instead of the auld broadsword that had a hundredweight of steel about it, what with blade, chape, and basket-hilt. I have heard their communing so often tauld over, that I almost think I was there myself, though I couldna be born at the time. (In fact, Alan, my companion mimicked, with a good deal of humour, the flattering, conciliating tone of the tenant's address, and the hypocritical melancholy of the laird's reply. His grandfather, he said, had, while he spoke, his eye fixed on the rental-book, as if it were a mastiff-dog that he was afraid would spring up and bite him.)

"I wuss ye joy, sir, of the head seat, and the white loaf, and the braid lairdship. Your father was a kind man to friends and followers; muckle grace to you, Sir John, to fill his shoon—his boots, I suld say, for he seldom wore shoon, unless it were muils when he had the gout."

"Aye, Steenie," quoth the laird, sighing deeply, and putting his napkin to his een, "his was a sudden call, and he will be missed in the country; no time to set his house in order—weel prepared Godward, no doubt, which is the root of the matter—but left us behind a tangled hesp to wind, Steenie. Hem! hem! We maun go to business, Steenie; much to do, and little time to do it in."

Here he opened the fatal volume. I have heard of a thing they call Doomsday Book—I am clear it has been a rental of back-ganging tenants.

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"Stephen," said Sir John, still in the same soft, sleekit tone of voice—"Stephen Stevenson, or Steenson, ye are down here for a year's rent behind the hand—due at last term."

Stephen. "Please your honour, Sir John, I paid it to your father."

Sir John. "Ye took a receipt, then, doubtless, Stephen; and can produce it?"

Stephen. "Indeed I hadna time, an it like your honour; for nae sooner had I set down the siller, and just as his honour, Sir Robert, that 's gaen, drew it till him to count it, and write out the receipt, he was ta'en wi' the pains that removed him."

"That was unlucky," said Sir John, after a pause. "But ye maybe paid it in the presence of somebody. I want but a *talis qualis* evidence, Stephen. I would go ower strictly to work with no poor man."

Stephen. "Troth, Sir John, there was naeboddy in the room but Dougal MacCallum the butler. But, as your honour kens, he has e'en followed his auld master."

"Very unlucky again, Stephen," said Sir John, without altering his voice a single note. "The man to whom ye paid the money is dead—and the man who witnessed the payment is dead too—and the siller, which should have been to the fore, is neither seen nor heard tell of in the repositories. How am I to believe a' this?"

Stephen. "I dinna ken, your honour; but there is a bit memorandum note of the very coins; for, God help me! I had to borrow out of twenty purses; and I am sure that ilka man there set down will take his grit oath for what purpose I borrowed the money."

Sir John. "I have little doubt ye *borrowed* the money, Steenie. It is the *payment* to my father that I want to have some proof of."

Stephen. "The siller maun be about the house, Sir John. And since your honour never got it, and his honour that was canna have taen it wi' him, maybe some of the family may have seen it."

Sir John. "We will examine the servants, Stephen; that is but reasonable."

But lackey and lass, and page and groom, all denied stoutly that they had ever seen such a bag of money as my gudesire described. What was waur, he had unluckily not mentioned to any living soul of them his purpose of paying his rent. Ae quean had noticed something under his arm, but she took it for the pipes.

Sir John Redgauntlet ordered the servants out of the room, and then said to my gudesire, "Now, *Steenie*, ye see ye have fair play; and, as I have little doubt ye ken better where to find the siller than any other body, I beg, in fair terms, and for your own sake, that you will end this fasherie; for, Stephen, ye maun pay or flit."

"The Lord forgie your opinion," said Stephen, driven almost to his wit's end—"I am an honest man.

"So am I, Stephen," said his honour; "and so are all the folks in the house, I hope. But if there be a knave amongst us, it must be he that tells the story he cannot prove." He paused, and then added, mair sternly, "If I understand your trick, sir, you want to take advantage of some malicious reports concerning things in this family, and particularly respecting my

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father's sudden death, thereby to cheat me out of the money, and perhaps take away my character, by insinuating that I have received the rent I am demanding. Where do you suppose this money to be? I insist upon knowing."

My gudesire saw everything look so muckle against him, that he grew nearly desperate—however, he shifted from one foot to another, looked to every corner of the room, and made no answer.

"Speak out, sirrah," said the laird, assuming a look of his father's, a very particular ane, which he had when he was angry—it seemed as if the wrinkles of his frown made that selfsame fearful shape of a horse's shoe in the middle of his brow—"Speak out, sir! I *will* know your thoughts;—do you suppose that I have this money?"

"Far be it frae me to say so," said Stephen.

"Do you charge any of my people with having taken it?"

"I wad be laith to charge them that may be innocent," said my gudesire; "and if there be any one that is guilty, I have nae proof."

"Somewhere the money must be, if there is a word of truth in your story," said Sir John; "I ask where you think it is—and demand a correct answer?"

"In hell, if you *will* have my thoughts of it," said my gudesire, driven to extremity, "in hell! with your father, his jackanape, and his silver whistle."

Down the stairs he ran (for the parlour was nae place for him after such a word) and he heard the laird swearing blood and wounds behind him, as fast as ever did Sir Robert, and roaring for the bailie and the baron-officer.

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Away rode my gudesire to his chief creditor (him they ca'd Laurie Lapraik) to try if he could make onything out of him; but when he tauld his story, he got but the worst word in his wame—thief, beggar and dyvour, were the safest terms; and to the boot of these hard terms, Laurie brought up the auld story of his dipping his hand in the blood of God's saunts, just as if a tenant could have helped riding with the laird, and that a laird like Sir Robert Redgauntlet. My gudesire was, by this time, far beyond the bounds of patience, and, while he and Laurie were at deil speed the liars, he was wanchancie aneugh to abuse Lapraik's doctrine as weel as the man, ond said things that garr'd folks' flesh grue that heard them;—he wasna just himsell, and he had lived wi' a wild set in his day.

At last they parted, and my gudesire was to ride hame through the wood of Pitmurkie, that is a' fou of black firs, as they say. I ken the wood, but the firs may be black or white for what I can tell. At the entry of the wood there is a wild common, and on the edge of the common, a little lonely change-house, that was keepit then by an ostler-wife, they suld hae caa'd her Tibbie Faw, and there puir Steenie cried for a mutchkin of brandy, for he had had no refreshment the haill day. Tibbie was earnest wi' him to take a bite of meat, but he couldna think o't, nor would he take his foot out of the stirrup, and took off the brandy wholly at twa draughts, and named a toast at each:—the first was the memory of Sir Robert Redgauntlet, and might he never lie quiet in his grave till he had righted his poor bond-tenant; and the second was a health to Man's Enemy, if he would

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but get him back the pock of siller or tell him what came o't, for he saw the haill world was like to regard him as a thief and a cheat, and he took that waur than even the ruin of his house and hauld.

On he rode, little caring where. It was a dark night turned, and the trees made it yet darker, and he let the beast take its ain road through the wood; when all of a sudden, from tired and wearied that it was before, the nag began to spring and flee, and stend, that my gudesire could hardly keep the saddle. Upon the whilk, a horseman, suddenly riding up beside him, said, "That's a mettle beast of yours, freend; will you sell him?" So saying, he touched the horse's neck with his riding-wand, and it fell into its auld heigh-ho of a stumbling trot. "But his spunk's soon out of him, I think," continued the stranger, "and that is like mony a man's courage, that thinks he wad do great things till he come to the proof."

My gudesire scarce listened to this, but spurred his horse, with "Gude e'en to you, freend."

But it's like the stranger was ane that doesna lightly yield his point; for, ride as Steenie liked, he was ay beside him at the selfsame pace. At last my gudesire, Steenie Steenson, grew half angry, and, to say the truth, half feared.

"What is it that ye want with me, freend?" he said. "If ye be a robber, I have nae money; if ye be a leal man, wanting company, I have nae heart to mirth or speaking; and if ye want to ken the road, I scarce ken it mysell."

"If you will tell me your grief," said the stranger, "I am one that, though I have been sair miscaa'd in the world, am the only hand for helping my freends."

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So my gudesire, to ease his ain heart, mair than from any hope of help, told him the story from beginning to end.

"It 's a hard pinch," said the stranger; "but I think I can help you."

"If you could lend the money, sir, and take a lang day—I ken nae other help on earth," said my gudesire.

"But there may be some under the earth," said the stranger. "Come, I'll be frank wi' you; I could lend you the money on bond, but you would maybe scruple my terms. Now, I can tell you, that your auld laird is disturbed in his grave by your curses, and the wailing of your family, and if ye daur venture to go to see him, he will give you the receipt."

My gudesire's hair stood on end at this proposal, but he thought his companion might be some humoursome chield that was trying to frighten him, and might end with lending him the money. Besides, he was bauld wi' brandy, and desperate wi' distress; and he said he had courage to go to the gate of hell, and a step farther, for that receipt. The stranger laughed.

"

Weel, they rode on through the thickest of the wood, when, all of a sudden, the horse stopped at the door of a great house; and, but that he knew the place was ten miles off, my father would have thought he was at Redgauntlet Castle. They rode into the outer courtyard, through the muckle faulding yetts and aneath the auld portcullis; and the whole front of the house was lighted, and there were pipes and fiddles, and as much dancing and deray within as used to be at Sir Robert's house at Pace and Yule, and such high

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seasons. They lap off, and my gudesire, as seemed to him, fastening his horse to the very ring he had tied him to that morning, when he gaed to wait on the young Sir John.

"God!" said my gudesire, "if Sir Robert's death be but a dream!"

He knocked at the ha' door just as he was wont and his auld acquaintance, Dougal MacCallum—just after his wont, too—came to open the door, and said, "Piper Steenie, are ye there, lad? Sir Robert has been crying for you."

My gudesire was like a man in a dream—he looked for the stranger, but he was gane for the time. At last he just tried to say, "Ha! Dougal Driveower, are ye living? I thought ye had been dead."

"Never fash yoursell wi' me," said Dougal, "but look to yoursell; and see ye tak naething frae ony body here, neither meat, drink, or siller, except just the receipt that is your ain."

So saying, he led the way out through halls and trances that were weel kend to my gudesire, and into the auld oak parlour; and there was as much singing of profane sangs, and birling of red wine, and speaking blasphemy and sculduddry, as had ever been in Redgauntlet Castle when it was at the blithest.

But, Lord take us in keeping, what a set of ghastly revellers they were that sat around that table! My gudesire kend mony that had long before gane to their place, for often had he piped to the most part in the hall of Redgauntlet. There was the fierce Middleton, and the dissolute Rothés, and the crafty Lauderdale; and Dalyell, with his bald head and a beard to his girdle; and Earlshall, with Cameron's

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blude on his hand; and wild Bonshaw, that tied blessed Mr. Cargill's limbs till the blude sprung; and Dunbarton Douglas, the twice-turned traitor baith to country and king. There was the Bluidy Advocate MacKenzie, who, for his worldly wit and wisdom had been to the rest as a god. And there was Claverhouse, as beautiful as when he lived, with his long, dark, curled locks streaming down over his laced buff-coat, and his left hand always on his right spule-blade, to hide the wound that the silver bullet had made. He sat apart from them all, and looked at them with a melancholy, haughty countenance; while the rest hallooed, and sang, and laughed, that the room rang. But their smiles were fearfully contorted from time to time; and their laugh passed into such wild sounds as made my gudesire's very nails grow blue, and chilled the marrow in his banes.

They that waited at the table were just the wicked serving-men and troopers, that had done their work and cruel bidding on earth. There was the Lang Lad of the Nethertown, that helped to take Argyle; and the bishop's summoner, that they called the Deil's Rattle-bag; and the wicked guardsmen in their laced coats; and the savage Highland Amorites, that shed blood like water; and many a proud serving-man, haughty of heart and bloody of hand, cringing to the rich, and making them wickeder than they would be; grinding the poor to powder, when the rich had broken them to fragments. And mony, mony mair were coming and ganging, a' as busy in their vocation as if they had been alive.

Sir Robert Redgauntlet, in the midst of a' this fearful riot, cried, wi' a voice like thunder, on Steenie

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Piper to come to the board-head where he was sitting; his legs stretched out before him, and swathed up with flannel, with his holster pistols aside him, while the great broadsword rested against his chair, just as my gudesire had seen him the last time upon earth—the very cushion for the jackanape was close to him, but the creature itself was not there—it wasna its hour, it's likely; for he heard them say as he came forward, "Is not the major come yet?" And another answered, "The jackanapes will be here betimes the morn." And when my gudesire came forward, Sir Robert, or his ghaist, or the deevil in his likeness, said, "Weel, piper, hae ye settled wi' my son for the year's rent?"

With much ado my father gat breath to say that Sir John would not settle without his honour's receipt.

"Ye shall hae that for a tune of the pipes, Steenie," said the appearance of Sir Robert—"Play us up 'Weel hoddled, Luckie'."

Now this was a tune my gudesire learned frae a warlock, that heard it when they were worshipping Satan at their meetings, and my gudesire had sometimes played it at the ranting suppers in Redgauntlet Castle, but never very willingly; and now he grew cauld at the very name of it, and said, for excuse, he hadna his pipers wi' him.

"MacCallum, ye limb of Beelzebub," said the fearfu' Sir Robert, "bring Steenie the pipes that I am keeping for him!"

MacCallum brought a pair of pipes which might have served the piper of Donald of the Isles. But he gave my gudesire a nudge as he offered them; and

looking secretly and closely, Steenie saw that the chanter was of steel, and heated to a white heat; so *he had fair warning not to trust his fingers with it. So he excused himself again, and said he was faint and frightened, and had not wind aneugh to fill the bag.*

"Then ye maun eat and drink, Steenie," said the figure; "for we do little else here; and it 's ill speaking between a fou man and a fasting."

Now these were the very words that the bloody Earl of Douglas said to keep the king's messenger in hand while he cut the head off MacLellan of Bombie, at the Threave Castle, and that put Steenie mair and mair on his guard. So he spoke up like a man, and said he came neither to eat, or drink, or make minstrelsy; but simply for his ain—to ken what was come o' the money he had paid, and to get a discharge for it; and he was so stout-hearted by this time that he charged Sir Robert for conscience-sake (he had no power to say the holy name) and as he hoped for peace and rest, to spread no snares for him, but just to give him his ain.

The appearance gnashed its teeth and laughed, but it took from a large pocket-book the receipt, and handed it to Steenie. "There is your receipt, ye pitiful cur; and for the money, my dog-whelp of a son may go look for it in the Cat's Cradle."

My gudesire uttered mony thanks, and was about to retire when Sir Robert roared aloud, "Stop, though, thou sack-doudling son of a whore! I am not done with thee. HERE we do nothing for nothing; and you must return on this very day twelvemonth, to pay your master the homage that you owe me for my protection."

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My father's tongue was loosed of a suddeny, and he said aloud, "I refer mysell to God's pleasure, and not to yours."

He had no sooner uttered the word than all was dark around him; and he sank on the earth with such a sudden shock, that he lost both breath and sense.

How lang Steenie lay there, he could not tell; but when he came to himsell, he was lying in the auld kirkyard of Redgauntlet parochine just at the door of the family aisle, and the scutcheon of the auld knight, Sir Robert, hanging over his head. There was a deep morning fog on grass and gravestane around him, and his horse was feeding quietly beside the minister's twa cows. Steenie would have thought the whole was a dream, but he had the receipt in his hand, fairly written and signed by the auld laird; only the last letters of his name were a little disorderly, written like one seized with sudden pain.

Sorely troubled in his mind, he left that dreary place, rode through the mist to Redgauntlet Castle, and wth much ado he got speech of the laird.

"Well, you dyvour bankrupt," was the first word, "have you brought me my rent?"

"No," answered my gudesire, "I have not; but I have brought your honour Sir Robert's receipt for it."

"How, sirrah? Sir Robert's receipt! You told me he had not given you one."

"Will your honour please to see if that bit line is right?"

Sir John looked at every line, and at every letter, with much attention; and at last, at the date, which my gudesire had not observed—"From my appointed

place," he read, "*this twenty-fifth of November.*"—"What!—That is yesterday!—Villain, thou must have gone to hell for this!"

"I got it from your honour's father—whether he be in heaven or hell, I know not," said Steenie.

"I will delate you for a warlock to the Privy Council!" said Sir John. "I will send you to your master, the devil, with the help of a tar-barrel and a torch!"

"I intend to delate mysell to the Presbytery," said Steenie, "and tell them all I have seen last night, whilk are things fitter for them to judge of than a borrel man like me."

Sir John paused, composed himsell, and desired to hear the full history; and my gudesire told it him from point to point, as I have told it you—word for word, neither more nor less.

Sir John was silent again for a long time, and at last he said, very composedly, "Steenie, this story of yours concerns the honour of many a noble family besides mine; and if it be a leasing-making, to keep yourself out of my danger, the least you can expect is to have a redhot iron driven through your tongue, and that will be as bad as scaulding your fingers wi' a redhot chanter. But yet it may be true, Steenie; and if the money cast up, I shall not know what to think of it. But where shall we find the Cat's Cradle? There are cats enough about the old house, but I think they kitten without the ceremony of bed or cradle."

"We were best ask Hutcheon," said my gudesire; "he kens a' the odd corners about as weel as—another serving-man that is now gane, and that I wad not like to name."

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Aweel, Hutcheon, when he was asked, told them, that a ruinous turret, lang disused, next to the clock-house, only accessible by a ladder, for the opening was on the outside, and far above the battlements, was called of old the Cat's Cradle.

"There will I go immediately," said Sir John; and he took (with what purpose, Heaven kens) one of his father's pistols from the hall-table, where they had lain since the night he died, and hastened to the battlements.

It was a dangerous place to climb, for the ladder was auld and frail, and wanted ane or twa rounds. However, up got Sir John, and entered at the turret-door, where his body stopped the only little light that was in the bit turret. Something flees at him wi' a vengeance, maist dang him back ower—bang gaed the knight's pistol, and Hutcheon, that held the ladder, and my gudesire that stood beside him, hears a loud skelloch. A minute after, Sir John flings the body of the jackanape down to them, and cries that the siller is fund, and that they should come up and help him. And there was the bag of siller sure aneugh, and mony orfa thing besides, that had been missing for mony a day. And Sir John, when he had ripped the turret weel, led my gudesire into the dining-parlour, and took him by the hand and spoke kindly to him, and said he was sorry he should have doubted his word and that he would hereafter be a good master to him to make amends.

"And now, Steenie," said Sir John, "although this vision of yours tend, on the whole, to my father's credit, as an honest man, that he should, even after his death, desire to see justice done to a poor man like

you, yet you are sensible that ill-dispositioned men might make bad constructions upon it, concerning his soul's health. So, I think, we had better lay the haill dirdum on that ill-deedie creature, Major Weir, and say naething about your dream in the wood of Pitmurkie. You had taken ower muckle brandy to be very certain about onything; and, Steenie, this receipt" (his hand shook while he held it out)—"it's but a queer kind of document, and we will do best, I think, to put it quietly in the fire."

"Od, but for as queer as it is, it's a' the voucher I have for my rent," said my gudesire, who was afraid, it may be, of losing the benefit of Sir Robert's discharge.

"I will bear the contents to your credit in the rental-book, and give you a discharge under my own hand," said Sir John, "and that on the spot. And, Steenie, if you can hold your tongue about this matter, you shall sit, from this term downward, at an easier rent."

"Mony thanks to your honour," said Steenie, who saw easily in what corner the wind was; "doubtless I will be conformable to all your honour's commands; only I would willingly speak wi' some powerful minister on the subject, for I do not like the sort of soumons of appointment whilk your honour's father——"

"Do not call the phantom my father!" said Sir John, interrupting him.

"Weel, then, the thing that was so like him," said my gudesire; "he spoke of my coming back to see him this time twelvemonth, and it's a weight on my conscience."

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"Aweel, then," said Sir John, "if you be so much distressed in mind, you may speak to our minister of the parish; he is a douce man, regards the honour of our family, and the mair that he may look for some patronage from me."

Wi' that, my father readily agreed that the receipt should be burnt, and the laird threw it into the chimney with his ain hand. Burn it would not for them, though; but away it flew up the lum, wi' a lang train of sparks at its tail, and a hissing noise like a squib.

My gudesire gaed down to the Manse, and the minister, when he had heard the story, said it was his real opinion that though my gudesire had gaen very far in tampering with dangerous matters, yet, as he had refused the devil's arles (for such was the offer of meat and drink) and had refused to do homage by piping at his bidding, he hoped, that if he held a circumspect walk hereafter, Satan could take little advantage by what was come and gane. And, indeed, my gudesire, of his ain accord, lang foreswore baith the pipes and the brady—it was not even till the year was out, and the fatal day past, that he would so much as take the fiddle, or drink usquebaugh or tippeny.

Sir John made up his story about the jackanape as he liked himsell; and some believe till this day there was no more in the matter than the filching nature of the brute. Indeed, ye'll no hinder some to threap that it was nane o' the auld Enemy that Dougal and my gudesire saw in the laird's room, but only that wanchancy creature, the major, capering on the coffin; and that, as to the blawing on the laird's whistle that was heard after he was dead, the filthy

brute could do that as weel as the laird himsell, if no better. But Heaven kens the truth, whilk first came out by the minister's wife, after Sir John and her ain gudeman were baith in the moulds. And then my gudesire, wha was failed in his limbs, but not in his judgment or memory—at least nothing to speak of—was obliged to tell the real narrative to his friends, for the credit of his good name. He might else have been charged for a warlock.

The shades of evening were growing thicker around us as my conductor finished his long narrative with this moral—"Ye see, birkie, it is nae chancy thing to tak a stranger traveller for a guide, when you are in an uncouth land."

"I should not have made that inference," said I. "Your grandfather's adventure was fortunate for himself, whom it saved from ruin and distress; and fortunate for his landlord also, whom it prevented from committing a gross act of injustice."

"Aye, but they had baith to sup the sauce o't sooner or later," said Wandering Willie—"what was fristed wasna forgiven. Sir John died before he was much over threescore; and it was just like of a moment's illness. And for my gudesire, though he departed in fullness of life, yet there was my father, a yauld man of forty-five, fell down betwixt the stilts of his pleugh, and rase never again, and left nae bairn but me, a puir sightless, fatherless, motherless creature, could neither work nor want. Things gaed weel aneugh at first; for Sir Redwald Redgauntlet, the only son of Sir John, and the oye of auld Sir Robert, and, waes me! the last of the honourable house, took the farm aff our hands, and brought me into his

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household to have care of me. He liked music, and I had the best teachers baith England and Scotland could gie me. Mony a merry year was I wi' him; but waes me! he gaed out with other pretty men in the Forty-five—I'll say nae mair about it—My head never settled weel since I lost him; and if I say another word about it, deil a bar will I have the heart to play the night. Look out, my gentle chap," he resumed in a different tone, "ye should see the lights at Brokenburn Glen by this time."

BY
DR. JOHN BROWN



RAB AND HIS FRIENDS

FOUR-AND-THIRTY years ago, Bob Ainslie and I were coming up Infirmary Street from the High School, our heads together, and our arms intertwined, as only lovers and boys know how, or why.

When we got to the top of the street, and turned north, we espied a crowd at the Tron Church. "A dog-fight!" shouted Bob, and was off; and so was I, both of us all but praying that it might not be over before we got up! And is not this boy-nature? and human nature too? and don't we all wish a house on fire not to be out before we see it? Dogs like fighting; old Isaac says they "delight" in it, and for the best of all reasons; and boys are not cruel because they like to see the fight. They see three of the great cardinal virtues of dog or man—courage, endurance, and skill—in intense action. This is very different from a love of making dogs fight, and enjoying, and aggravating, and making gain by their pluck. A boy—be he ever so fond himself of fighting, if he be a good boy, hates and despises all this, but he would have run off with Bob and me fast enough: it is a natural and a not wicked interest that all boys and men have in witnessing intense energy in action.

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Does any curious and finely-ignorant woman wish to know how Bob's eye at a glance announced a dog-fight to his brain? He did not, he could not, see the dogs fighting; it was a flash of an inference, a rapid induction. The crowd round a couple of dogs fighting is a crowd masculine mainly, with an occasional active, compassionate woman, fluttering wildly round the outside, and using her tongue and her hands freely upon the men, as so many "brutes"; it is a crowd annular, compact, and mobile; a crowd centripetal, having its eyes and its head all bent downwards and inwards, to one common focus.

Well, Bob and I are up, and find it is not over: a small thoroughbred, white bull-terrier, is busy throttling a large shepherd's dog, unaccustomed to war, but not to be trifled with. They are hard at it; the scientific little fellow doing his work in great style, his pastoral enemy fighting wildly, but with the sharpest of teeth and a great courage. Science and breeding, however, soon had their own; the Game Chicken, as the premature Bob called him, working his way up, took his final grip of poor Yarrow's throat—and he lay gasping and done for. His master, a brown, handsome, big young shepherd from Tweedsmuir, would have liked to have knocked down any man, would "drink up Esil, or eat a crocodile," for that part, if he had a chance: it was no use kicking the little dog; that would only make him hold the closer. Many were the means shouted out in mouthfuls, of the best possible ways of ending it. "Water!" but there was none near, and many cried for it who might have got it from the well at Blackfriars Wynd. "Bite the tail!" and a large, vague,

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benevolent, middle-aged man, more desirous than wise, with some struggle got the bushy end of *Yarrow's* tail into his ample mouth, and bit it with all his might. This was more than enough for the much-enduring, much-perspiring shepherd, who, with a gleam of joy over his broad visage, delivered a terrific facer upon our large, vague, benevolent, middle-aged friend—who went down like a shot.

Still the Chicken holds; death not far off. "Snuff! a pinch of snuff!" observed a calm, highly-dressed young buck, with an eye-glass in his eye. "Snuff, indeed!" growled the angry crowd, affronted and glaring. "Snuff! a pinch of snuff!" again observes the buck, but with more urgency; whereupon were produced several open boxes, and from a mull which may have been at Culloden, he took a pinch, knelt down, and presented it to the nose of the Chicken. The laws of physiology and of snuff take their course; the Chicken sneezes, and *Yarrow* is free!

The young pastoral giant stalks off with *Yarrow* in his arms—comforting him.

But the Bull Terrier's blood is up, and his soul unsatisfied; he grips the first dog he meets, and discovering she is not a dog, in Homeric phrase, he makes a brief sort of *amende*, and is off. The boys, with Bob and me at their head, are after him: down Niddry Street he goes, bent on mischief; up the Cowgate like an arrow—Bob and I, and our small men, panting behind.

There, under the single arch of the South Bridge, is a huge mastiff, sauntering down the middle of the causeway, as if with his hands in his pockets: he is old, grey, brindled, as big as a little Highland bull,

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and has the Shakespearean dewlaps shaking as he goes.

The Chicken makes straight at him, and fastens on his throat. To our astonishment, the great creature does nothing but stand still, hold himself up, and roar—yes, roar; a long, serious, remonstrative roar. How is this? Bob and I are up to them. *He is muzzled!* The bailies had proclaimed a general muzzling, and his master, studying strength and economy mainly, had encompassed his huge jaws in a home-made apparatus constructed out of the leather of some ancient *breechin*. His mouth was open as far as it could; his lips curled up in rage—a sort of terrible grin; his teeth gleaming, ready, from out the darkness; the strap across his mouth tense as a bow-string; his whole frame stiff with indignation and surprise; his roar asking us all round, “Did you ever see the like of this?” He looked a statue of anger and astonishment, done in Aberdeen granite.

We soon had a crowd: the Chicken held on. “A knife!” cried Bob; and a cobbler gave him his knife: you know the kind of knife, worn away obliquely to a point, and always keen. I put its edge to the tense leather; it ran before it; and then!—one sudden jerk of that enormous head, a sort of dirty mist about his mouth, no noise—and the bright and fierce little fellow is dropped, limp, and dead. A solemn pause: this was more than any of us had bargained for. I turned the little fellow over, and saw he was quite dead: the mastiff had taken him by the small of the back like a rat, and broken it.

He looked down at his victim appeased, ashamed, and amazed; snuffed him all over, stared at him, and

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taking a sudden thought, turned round and trotted off. Bob took the dead dog up, and said, "John, we'll bury him after tea." "Yes," said I, and was off after the mastiff. He made up the Cowgate at a rapid swing; he had forgotten some engagement. He turned up the Candlemaker Row, and stopped at the Harrow Inn.

There was a carrier's cart ready to start, and a keen, thin, impatient, black-a-vised little man, his hand at his grey horse's head, looking about angrily for something. "Rab, ye thief!" said he, aiming a kick at my great friend, who drew cringing up, and avoiding the heavy shoe with more agility than dignity, and watching his master's eye, slunk dismayed under the cart—his ears down, and as much as he had of tail down too.

What a man this must be—thought I—to whom my tremendous hero turns tail! The carrier saw the muzzle hanging, cut and useless, from his neck, and I eagerly told him the story, which Bob and I always thought, and still think, Homer, or King David, or Sir Walter, alone were worthy to rehearse. The severe little man was mitigated, and condescended to say, "Rab, ma man, puir Rabbie"—whereupon the stump of a tail rose up, the ears were cocked, the eyes filled, and were comforted; the two friends were reconciled. "Hupp!" and a stroke of the whip were given to Jess; and off went the three.

Bob and I buried the Game Chicken that night (we had not much of a tea) in the back-green of his house, in Melville Street, No. 17, with considerable gravity and silence; and being at the time in the

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Iliad, and, like all boys, Trojans, we called him Hector of course.

Six years have passed—a long time for a boy and a dog: Bob Ainslie is off to the wars; I am a medical student, and clerk at Minto House Hospital.

Rab I saw almost every week, on the Wednesday; and we had much pleasant intimacy. I found the way to his heart by frequent scratching of his huge head, and an occasional bone. When I did not notice him he would plant himself straight before me, and stand wagging that bud of a tail, and looking up, with his head a little to the one side. His master I occasionally saw; he used to call me "Maister John", but was laconic as any Spartan.

One fine October afternoon, I was leaving the hospital, when I saw the large gate open, and in walked Rab, with that great and easy saunter of his. He looked as if taking general possession of the place; like the Duke of Wellington entering a subdued city, satiated with victory and peace. After him came Jess, now white with age, with her cart; and in it a woman carefully wrapped up—the carrier leading the horse anxiously, and looking back. When he saw me, James (for his name was James Noble) made a curt and grotesque "boo", and said, "Maister John, this is the mistress; she's got a trouble in her breest—some kind o' an income we're thinkin'."

By this time I saw the woman's face; she was sitting on a sack filled with straw, with her husband's plaid round her, and his big-coat, with its large white metal buttons, over her feet.

I never saw a more unforgettable face—pale,

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serious, *lonely*,¹ delicate, sweet, without being at all what we call fine. She looked sixty, and had on a mutch, white as snow, with its black ribbon; her silvery, smooth hair setting off her dark-grey eyes—eyes such as one sees only twice or thrice in a lifetime, full of suffering, full also of the overcoming of it: her eyebrows black and delicate,² and her mouth firm, patient, and contented, which few mouths ever are.

As I have said, I never saw a more beautiful countenance, or one more subdued to settled quiet. "Ailie," said James, "this is Maister John, the young doctor; Rab's freend, ye ken. We often speak aboot you, doctor." She smiled, and made a movement, but said nothing; and prepared to come down, putting her plaid aside and rising. Had Solomon, in all his glory, been handing down the Queen of Sheba at his palace gate, he could not have done it more daintily, more tenderly, more like a gentleman, than did James the Howgate carrier, when he lifted down Ailie his wife. The contrast of his small, swarthy, weather-beaten, keen, worldly face to hers—pale, subdued, and beautiful—was something wonderful. Rab looked on, concerned and puzzled, but ready for anything that might turn up—were it to strangle

¹ It is not easy giving this look by one word; it was expressive of her being so much of her life alone.

² . . . Black brows, they say,
Become some women best; so that there be not
Too much hair there, *but in a semicircle.*
Or a half-moon made with a pen.

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the nurse, the porter, or even me. Ailie and he seemed great friends.

"As I was sayin', she 's got a kind o' trouble in her breest, doctor; wull ye tak' a look at it?" We walked into the consulting room, all four; Rab grim and comic, willing to be happy and confidential if cause could be shown, willing also to be the reverse, on the same terms. Ailie sat down, undid her open gown and her lawn handkerchief round her neck, and, without a word, showed me her right breast. I looked at and examined it carefully—she and James watching me, and Rab eyeing all three. What could I say? there it was, that had once been so soft, so shapely, so white, so gracious and bountiful, so "full of all blessed conditions"—hard as a stone, a centre of horrid pain, making that pale face, with its grey, lucid, reasonable eyes, and its sweet resolved mouth, express the full measure of suffering overcome. Why was that gentle, modest, sweet woman, clean and lovable, condemned by God to bear such a burden?

I got her away to bed. "May Rab and me bide?" said James. "*You* may; and Rab, if he will behave himself." "I'se warrant he 's do that, doctor"; and in slunk the faithful beast. I wish you could have seen him. There are no such dogs now. He belonged to a lost tribe. As I have said, he was brindled and grey like Rubislaw granite; his hair short, hard, and close, like a lion's; his body thick-set, like a little bull—a sort of compressed Hercules of a dog. He must have been ninety pounds' weight, at the least; he had a large blunt head; his muzzle black as night, his mouth blacker than any night, a tooth

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or two—being all he had—gleaming out of his jaws of darkness. His head was scarred with the records of old wounds, a sort of series of fields of battle all over it; one eye out, one ear cropped as close as was Archbishop Leighton's father's; the remaining eye had the power of two; and above it, and in constant communication with it, was a tattered rag of an ear, which was for ever unfurling itself, like an old flag; and then that bud of a tail, about one inch long, if it could in any sense be said to be long, being as broad as long—the mobility, the instantaneousness of that bud were very funny and surprising, and its expressive twinklings and winkings, the intercommunications between the eye, the ear, and it, were of the oddest and swiftest.

Rab had the dignity and simplicity of great size; and having fought his way all along the road to absolute supremacy, he was as mighty in his own line as Julius Caesar or the Duke of Wellington, and had the gravity¹ of all great fighters.

You must have often observed the likeness of certain men to certain animals, and of certain dogs to men. Now, I never look at Rab without thinking of the great Baptist preacher, Andrew Fuller.² The

¹ A Highland game-keeper, when asked why a certain terrier, of singular pluck, was so much more solemn than the other dogs, said, "Oh, Sir, life's full o'sarriousness to him—he jist never can get eneuch o' fechtin'."

² Fuller was, in early life, when a farmer lad at Soham, famous as a boxer; not quarrelsome, but not without "the stern delight" a man of strength and courage feels in their exercise. Dr. Charles Stewart of Duncarn, whose rare gifts and graces as a physician, a divine, a scholar, and a gentleman, live only in the memory of those few who knew and survive him, liked to tell how Mr. Fuller used

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same large, heavy, menacing, combative, sombre, honest countenance, the same deep inevitable eye, the same look, as of thunder asleep, but ready—neither a dog nor a man to be trifled with.

Next day, my master, the surgeon, examined Ailie. There was no doubt it must kill her, and soon. It could be removed—it might never return—it would give her speedy relief—she should have it done. She curtsied, looked at James, and said, "When?" "To-morrow," said the kind surgeon—a man of few words. She and James and Rab and I retired. I noticed that he and she spoke little, but seemed to anticipate everything in each other. The following day, at noon, the students came in, hurrying up the great stair. At the first landing-place, on a small well-known black board, was a bit of paper fastened by wafers, and many remains of old wafers beside it. On the paper were the words—"An operation to-day—J. B. Clerk."

Up ran the youths, eager to secure good places: in they crowded, full of interest and talk. "What's the case?" "Which side is it?"

Don't think them heartless; they are neither better nor worse than you or I: they get over their professional horrors, and into their proper work; and in them pity, as an *emotion*, ending in itself or at best in tears and a long-drawn breath, lessens—while

to say, that when he was in the pulpit, and saw a *buirdly* man come along the passage, he would instinctively draw himself up, measure his imaginary antagonist, and forecast how he would deal with him, his hands meanwhile condensing into fists, and tending to "square." He must have been a hard hitter if he boxed as he preached—what "The Fancy" would call "an ugly customer."

pity, as a *motive*, is quickened, and gains power and purpose. It is well for poor human nature that it is so.

The operating theatre is crowded; much talk and fun, and all the cordiality and stir of youth. The surgeon with his staff of assistants is there. In comes Ailie; one look at her quiets and abates the eager students. That beautiful old woman is too much for them; they sit down, and are dumb, and gaze at her. These rough boys feel the power of her presence. She walks in quickly, but without haste; dressed in her mutch, her neckerchief, her white dimity short-gown, her black bombazeen petticoat, showing her white worsted stockings and her carpet-shoes. Behind her was James with Rab. James sat down in the distance, and took that huge and noble head between his knees. Rab looked perplexed and dangerous; for ever cocking his ear and dropping it as fast.

Ailie stepped up on a seat, and laid herself on the table, as her friend the surgeon told her; arranged herself, gave a rapid look at James, shut her eyes, rested herself on me, and took my hand. The operation was at once begun; it was necessarily slow; and chloroform—one of God's best gifts to his suffering children—was then unknown. The surgeon did his work. The pale face showed its pain, but was still and silent. Rab's soul was working within him; he saw that something strange was going on—blood flowing from his mistress, and she suffering; his ragged ear was up, and importunate; he growled and gave now and then a sharp impatient yelp; he would have liked to have done something to that man. But

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James had him firm, and gave him a *glower* from time to time, and an intimation of a possible kick;—all the better for James, it kept his eye and his mind off Ailie.

It is over: she is dressed, steps gently and decently down from the table, looks for James; then, turning to the surgeon and the students, she curtsies—and in a low, clear voice, begs their pardon if she has behaved ill. The students—all of us—wept like children; the surgeon happed her up carefully—and, resting on James and me, Ailie went to her room, Rab following. We put her to bed. James took off his heavy shoes, crammed with tackets, heel-capt and toe-capt, and put them carefully under the table, saying, “Maister John, I’m for nane o’ yer stryngie nurse bodies for Ailie. I’ll be her nurse, and I’ll gang about on my stockin’ soles as canny as pussy.” And so he did; and handy and clever, and swift and tender as any woman, was that horny-handed, snell, peremptory little man. Everything she got he gave her: he seldom slept; and often I saw his small shrewd eyes out of the darkness, fixed on her. As before, they spoke little.

Rab behaved well, never moving, showing us how meek and gentle he could be, and occasionally, in his sleep, letting us know that he was demolishing some adversary. He took a walk with me every day, generally to the Candlemaker Row; but he was sombre and mild; declined doing battle, though some fit cases offered, and indeed submitted to sundry indignities; and was always very ready to turn, and came faster back, and trotted up the stair with much lightness, and went straight to that door.

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Jess, the mare, had been sent, with her weather-worn cart, to Howgate, and had doubtless her own dim and placid meditations and confusions, on the absence of her master and Rab, and her unnatural freedom from the road and her cart.

For some days Ailie did well. The wound healed "by the first intention"; for as James said, "Oor Ailie's skin 's ower clean to beil." The students came in quiet and anxious, and surrounded her bed. She said she liked to see their young, honest faces. The surgeon dressed her, and spoke to her in his own short kind way, pitying her through his eyes, Rab and James outside the circle—Rab being now reconciled, and even cordial, and having made up his mind that as yet nobody required worrying, but, as you may suppose, *semper paratus*.

So far well: but, four days after the operation, my patient had a sudden and long shivering, a "groosin'", as she called it. I saw her soon after; her eyes were too bright, her cheek coloured; she was restless, and ashamed of being so; the balance was lost; mischief had begun. On looking at the wound, a blush of red told the secret; her pulse was rapid, her breathing anxious and quick; she wasn't herself, as she said, and was vexed at her restlessness. We tried what we could. James did everything, was everywhere; never in the way, never out of it; Rab subsided under the table into a dark place, and was motionless, all but his eye, which followed every one. Ailie got worse; began to wander in her mind, gently; was more demonstrative in her ways to James, rapid in her questions, and sharp at times. He was vexed, and said, "She was never that way afore; no, never."

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For a time she knew her head was wrong, and was always asking our pardon—the dear gentle old woman: then delirium set in strong, without pause. Her brain gave way, and then came that terrible spectacle,

*The intellectual power, through words and things,
Went sounding on its dim and perilous way;*

she sang bits of old songs and Psalms, stopping suddenly, mingling the Psalms of David, and the diviner words of his Son and Lord, with homely odds and ends and scraps of ballads.

Nothing more touching, or in a sense more strangely beautiful, did I ever witness. Her tremulous, rapid, affectionate, eager, Scotch voice—the swift, aimless, bewildered mind, the baffled utterance, the bright and perilous eye; some wild words, some household cares, something for James, the names of the dead, Rab called rapidly and in a “fremyt” voice, and he starting up, surprised, and slinking off as if he were to blame somehow, or had been dreaming he heard. Many eager questions and beseechings which James and I could make nothing of, and on which she seemed to set her all, and then sink back understood. It was very sad, but better than many things that are not called sad. James hovered about, put out and miserable, but active and exact as ever; read to her, when there was a lull, short bits from the Psalms, prose and metre, chanting the latter in his own rude and serious way, showing great knowledge of the fit words, bearing up like a man, and doating over her as his “ain Ailie”. “Ailie, ma woman!” “Ma ain bonnie wee dawtiel!”

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The end was drawing on: the golden bowl was breaking; the silver cord was fast being loosed—that *animula, blandula, vagula, hospes, comesque*, was about to flee. The body and the soul—companions for sixty years—were being sundered, and taking leave. She was walking, alone, through the valley of that shadow into which one day we must all enter—and yet she was not alone, for we know whose rod and staff were comforting her.

One night she had fallen quiet, and, as we hoped, asleep; her eyes were shut. We put down the gas, and sat watching her. Suddenly she sat up in bed, and taking a bedgown which was lying on it rolled up, she held it eagerly to her breast—to the right side. We could see her eyes bright with a surprising tenderness and joy, bending over this bundle of clothes. She held it as a woman holds her sucking child; opening out her night-gown impatiently, and holding it close, and brooding over it, and murmuring foolish little words, as over one whom his mother comforteth, and who sucks and is satisfied. It was pitiful and strange to see her wasted dying look, keen and yet vague—her immense love.

“Preserve me!” groaned James, giving way. And then she rocked back and forward, as if to make it sleep, hushing it, and wasting on it her infinite fondness. “Wae ’s me, doctor; I declare she ’s thinkin’ it’s that bairn.” “What bairn?” “The only bairn we ever had; our wee Mysie, and she ’s in the Kingdom forty years and mair.” It was plainly true: the pain in the breast, telling its urgent story to a bewildered, ruined brain, was misread and mistaken; it suggested to her the uneasiness of a breast full of

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milk, and then the child; and so again once more they were together, and she had her ain wee Mysie in her bosom.

This was the close. She sank rapidly: the delirium left her; but, as she whispered, she was "clean silly"; it was the lightening before the final darkness. After having for some time lain still—her eyes shut, she said, "James!" He came close to her, and lifting up her calm, clear, beautiful eyes, she gave him a long look, turned to me kindly but shortly, looked for Rab but could not see him, then turned to her husband again, as if she would never leave off looking, shut her eyes, and composed herself. She lay for some time breathing quick, and passed away so gently, that when we thought she was gone, James, in his old-fashioned way, held the mirror to her face. After a long pause, one small spot of dimness was breathed out; it vanished away, and never returned, leaving the blank clear darkness without a stain. "What is our life? it is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Rab all this time had been full awake and motionless: he came forward beside us: Ailie's hand, which James had held, was hanging down; it was soaked with his tears; Rab licked it all over carefully, looked at her, and returned to his place under the table.

James and I sat, I don't know how long, but for some time—saying nothing; he started up abruptly, and with some noise went to the table, and putting his right fore and middle fingers each into a shoe, pulled them out, and put them on, breaking one of the leather latches, and muttering in anger, "I never did the like o' that afore!"

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I believe he never did; nor after either. "Rab!" he said roughly, and pointing with his thumb to the bottom of the bed. Rab leapt up, and settled himself; *his head and eye to the dead face.* "Maister John, ye'll wait for me," said the carrier; and disappeared in the darkness, thundering down stairs in his heavy shoes. I ran to a front window: there he was, already round the house, and out at the gate, fleeing like a shadow.

I was afraid about him, and yet not afraid; so I sat down beside Rab, and being wearied, fell asleep. I awoke with a sudden noise outside. It was November, and there had been a heavy fall of snow. Rab was *in statu quo*; he heard the noise too, and plainly knew it, but never moved. I looked out; and there, at the gate, in the dim morning—for the sun was not up, was Jess and the cart—a cloud of steam rising from the old mare. I did not see James; he was already at the door, and came up the stairs, and met me. It was less than three hours since he left, and he must have posted out—who knows how?—to Howgate, full nine miles off; yoked Jess, and driven her astonished into town. He had an armful of blankets, and was streaming with perspiration. He nodded to me, spread out on the floor two pairs of clean old blankets having at their corners, "A. G., 1794", in large letters in red worsted. These were the initials of Alison Graeme, and James may have looked in at her from without—himself unseen but not unthought of—when he was "wat, wat, and weary", and after having walked many a mile over the hills, may have seen her sitting, while "a' the lave were sleepin'," and by the firelight working her name on the blan-

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kets, for her ain James's bed.

He motioned Rab down, and taking his wife in his arms, laid her in the blankets, and happed her *carefully and firmly up, leaving the face uncovered; and then lifting her, he nodded again sharply to me,* and with a resolved but utterly miserable face, strode along the passage, and downstairs, followed by Rab. I followed with a light; but he didn't need it. I went out, holding stupidly the candle in my hand in the calm frosty air; we were soon at the gate. I could have helped him, but I saw he was not to be meddled with, and he was strong, and did not need it. He laid her down as tenderly, as safely, as he had lifted her out ten days before—as tenderly as when he had her first in his arms when she was only "A.G."—sorted her, leaving that beautiful sealed face open to the heavens; and then, taking Jess by the head, he moved away. He did not notice me, neither did Rab, who presided behind the cart.

I stood till they passed through the long shadow of the College, and turned up Nicholson Street. I heard the solitary cart sound through the streets, and die away and come again; and I returned, thinking of that company going up Libberton Brae, then along Roslin Muir, the morning light touching the Pentlands, and making them like on-looking ghosts; then down the hill through the Auchindinny woods, past "haunted Woodhouselee"; and as daybreak came sweeping up the bleak Lammermuirs, and fell on his own door, the company would stop, and James would take the key, and lift Ailie up again, laying her on her own bed, and, having put Jess up, would return with Rab and shut the door.

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James buried his wife, with his neighbours mourning, Rab inspecting the solemnity from a distance. It was snow, and that black ragged hole would look strange in the midst of the swelling spotless cushion of white. James looked after everything; then rather suddenly felt ill, and took to bed; was insensible when the doctor came, and soon died. A sort of low fever was prevailing in the village, and his want of sleep, his exhaustion, and his misery, made him apt to take it. The grave was not difficult to re-open. A fresh fall of snow had again made all things white and smooth; Rab once more looked on, and slunk home to the stable.

And what of Rab? I asked for him next week at the new carrier who got the goodwill of James's business and was now master of Jess and her cart. "How's Rab?" He put me off, and said rather rudely, "What's *your* business wi' the dowg?" I was not to be so put off. "Where's Rab?" He, getting confused and red, and intermeddling with his hair, said, "'Deed, sir, Rab 's deid." "Dead! what did he die of?" "Weel, sir," said he, getting redder, "he didna exactly dee; he was killed. I had to brain him wi' a rack-pin; there was nae doin' wi' him. He lay in the treviss wi' the mear, and wadna come oot. I temptit him wi' kail and meat, but he wad tak naething, and keepit me frae feedin' the beast, and he was aye gur gurrin', and grup gruppin' me by the legs. I was laith to make awa wi' the auld dowg, his like wasna atween this and Thornhill—but, 'deed, sir, I could do naething else." I believed him. Fit end for Rab, quick and complete. His teeth and his

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friends gone, why should he keep the peace, and be civil?

He was buried on the braeface, near the burn, the children of the village—his companions, who used to make very free with him and sit on his ample stomach as he lay half asleep at the door in the sun—watching the solemnity from a distance.

BY
MRS. OLIPHANT



THE OPEN DOOR

I TOOK THE house of Brentwood on my return from India in 18——, for the temporary accommodation of my family, until I could find a permanent home for them. It had many advantages which made it peculiarly appropriate. It was within reach of Edinburgh, and my boy Roland, whose education had been considerably neglected, could go in and out to school, which was thought to be better for him than either leaving home altogether or staying there always with a tutor. The first of these expedients would have seemed preferable to me, the second commended itself to his mother. The doctor, like a judicious man, took the midway between. "Put him on his pony, and let him ride into the High School every morning; it will do him all the good in the world," Dr. Simson said; "and when it is bad weather there is the train." His mother accepted this solution of the difficulty more easily than I could have hoped; and our pale-faced boy, who had never known anything more invigorating than Simla, began to encounter the brisk breezes of the North in the subdued severity of the month of May. Before the time of the vacation in July we had the satisfaction of

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seeing him begin to acquire something of the brown and ruddy complexion of his schoolfellows. The English system did not commend itself to Scotland in these days. There was no little Eton at Fettes; nor do I think, if there had been, that a genteel exotic of that class would have tempted either my wife or me. The lad was doubly precious to us, being the only one left us of many; and he was fragile in body, we believed, and deeply sensitive in mind. To keep him at home, and yet to send him to school—to combine the advantages of the two systems—seemed to be everything that could be desired. The two girls also found at Brentwood everything they wanted. They were near enough to Edinburgh to have masters and lessons as many as they required for completing that never-ending education which the young people seem to require nowadays. Their mother married me when she was younger than Agatha, and I should like to see them improve upon their mother! I myself was then no more than twenty-five—an age at which I see the young fellows now groping about them, with no notion what they are going to do with their lives. However, I suppose every generation has a conceit of itself which elevates it, in its own opinion, above that which comes after it.

Brentwood stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country, one of the richest in Scotland, which lies between the Pentland Hills and the Firth. In clear weather you could see the blue gleam—like a bent bow, embracing the wealthy fields and scattered houses—of the great estuary on one side of you; and on the other the blue heights, not gigantic like those we had been used to, but just high enough for all the

glories of the atmosphere, the play of clouds, and sweet reflections, which give to a hilly country an interest and a charm which nothing else can emulate. Edinburgh, with its two lesser heights—the Castle and the Calton Hill—its spires and towers piercing through the smoke, and Arthur's Seat lying crouched behind, like a guardian no longer very needful, taking his repose beside the well-beloved charge, which is now, so to speak, able to take care of itself without him—lay at our right hand. From the lawn and drawing-room windows we could see all these varieties of landscape. The colour was sometimes a little chilly, but sometimes, also, as animated and full of vicissitude as a drama. I was never tired of it. Its colour and freshness revived the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies. It was always cheery, and fresh, and full of repose.

The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream—which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little river—flowed between its rocks and trees. The river, like so many in that district, had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grimy with paper-making. But this did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams. Perhaps our water was more rapid—perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse. Our side of the dell was charmingly *accidenté*, and clothed with fine trees, through which various paths wound down to the river-side and to the village bridge which crossed the stream. The village lay in the hollow, and climbed, with very prosaic houses, the other side. Village architecture does not flourish

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in Scotland. The blue slates and the grey stone are sworn foes to the picturesque; and though I do not, for my own part, dislike the interior of an old-fashioned pewed and galleried church, with its little family settlements on all sides, the square box outside, with its bit of a spire like a handle to lift it by, is not an improvement to the landscape. Still, a cluster of houses on differing elevations—with scraps of garden coming in between, a hedgerow with clothes laid out to dry, the opening of a street with its rural sociability, the women at their doors, the slow waggon lumbering along—gives a centre to the landscape. It was cheerful to look at, and convenient in a hundred ways. Within ourselves we had walks in plenty, the glen being always beautiful in all its phases, whether the woods were green in the spring or ruddy in the autumn. In the park which surrounded the house were the ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood, a much smaller and less important house than the solid Georgian edifice which we inhabited. The ruins were picturesque, however, and gave importance to the place. Even we, who were but temporary tenants, felt a vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain consequence upon ourselves. The old building had the remains of a tower, an indistinguishable mass of mason-work, overgrown with ivy, and the shells of walls attached to this were half filled up with soil. I had never examined it closely, I am ashamed to say. There was a large room, or what had been a large room, with the lower part of the windows still existing, on the principal floor, and underneath other windows, which were perfect, though half filled up with fallen soil, and waving with a wild

growth of brambles and chance growths of all kinds. This was the oldest part of all. At a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of the building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed. This was the end of a low gable, a bit of grey wall, all encrusted with lichens, in which was a common doorway. Probably it had been a servants' entrance, a back-door, or opening into what are called "the offices" in Scotland. No offices remained to be entered—pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing—closed once perhaps with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. It impressed me, I remember, from the first; so perhaps it may be said that my mind was prepared to attach to it an importance which nothing justified.'

The summer was a very happy period of repose for us all. The warmth of Indian suns was still in our veins. It seemed to us that we could never have enough of the greenness, the dewiness, the freshness of the northern landscape. Even its mists were pleasant to us, taking all the fever out of us, and pouring in vigour and refreshment. In autumn we followed the fashion of the time, and went away for change which we did not in the least require. It was when the family had settled down for the winter, when the days were short and dark, and the rigorous reign of frost upon us, that the incidents occurred

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which alone could justify me in intruding upon the world my private affairs. These incidents were, however, of so curious a character, that I hope my inevitable references to my own family and pressing personal interests will meet with a general pardon.

I was absent in London when these events began. In London an old Indian plunges back into the interests with which all his previous life has been associated, and meets old friends at every step. I had been circulating among some half-dozen of these—enjoying the return to my former life in shadow, though I had been so thankful in substance to throw it aside—and had missed some of my home letters, what with going down from Friday to Monday to old Benbow's place in the country, and stopping on the way back to dine and sleep at Sellar's and to take a look into Cross's stables, which occupied another day. It is never safe to miss one's letters. In this transitory life, as the Prayer Book says, how can one ever be certain what is going to happen? All was well at home. I knew exactly (I thought) what they would have to say to me: "The weather has been so fine, that Roland has not once gone by train, and he enjoys the ride beyond anything." "Dear papa, be sure that you don't forget anything, but bring us so-and-so and so-and-so"—a list as long as my arm. Dear girls and dearer mother! I would not for the world have forgotten their commissions, or lost their little letters, for all the Benbows and Crosses in the world.

But I was confident in my home-comfort and peacefulness. When I got back to my club, however, three or four letters were lying for me, upon some of which I noticed the "immediate," "urgent," which

old-fashioned people and anxious people still believe will influence the post office and quicken the speed of the mails. I was about to open one of these, when the club porter brought me two telegrams, one of which, he said, had arrived the night before. I opened, as was to be expected, the last first, and this was what I read: "Why don't you come or answer? For God's sake, come. He is much worse." This was a thunderbolt to fall upon a man's head who had one only son, and he the light of his eyes! The other telegram, which I opened with hands trembling so much that I lost time by my haste, was to much the same purport: "No better; doctor afraid of brain-fever. Calls for you day and night. Let nothing detain you. The first thing I did was to look up the time-tables to see if there was any way of getting off sooner than by the night-train, though I knew well enough there was not; and then I read the letters, which furnished, alas! too clearly, all the details. They told me that the boy had been pale for some time, with a scared look. His mother had noticed it before I left home, but would not say anything to alarm me. This look had increased day by day; and soon it was observed that Roland came home at a wild gallop through the park, his pony panting and in foam, himself "as white as a sheet," but with the perspiration streaming from his forehead. For a long time he had resisted all questioning, but at length had developed such strange changes of mood, showing a reluctance to go to school, a desire to be fetched in the carriage at night—which was a ridiculous piece of luxury—an unwillingness to go out into the grounds, and nervous start at every sound,

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that his mother had insisted upon an explanation. When the boy—our boy Roland, who had never known what fear was—began to talk to her of voices he had heard in the park, and shadows that had appeared to him among the ruins, my wife promptly put him to bed and sent for Dr. Simson—which, of course, was the only thing to do.

I hurried off that evening, as may be supposed, with an anxious heart. How I got through the hours before the starting of the train, I cannot tell. We must all be thankful for the quickness of the railway when in anxiety; but to have thrown myself into a post-chaise as soon as horses could be put to, would have been a relief. I got to Edinburgh very early in the blackness of the winter morning, and scarcely dared look the man in the face at whom I gasped, "What news?" My wife had sent the brougham for me, which I concluded, before the man spoke, was a bad sign. His answer was that stereotyped answer which leaves the imagination so wildly free—"Just the same." Just the same! What might that mean? The horses seemed to me to creep along the long dark country road. As we dashed through the park, I thought I heard someone moaning among the trees, and clenched my fist at him (whoever he might be) with fury. Why had the fool of a woman at the gate allowed anyone to come in to disturb the quiet of the place? If I had not been in such hot haste to get home, I think I should have stopped the carriage and got out to see what tramp it was that had made an entrance, and chosen my grounds, of all places in the world—when my boy was ill!—to grumble and groan in. But I had no reason to complain of our

slow pace here. The horses flew like lightning along the intervening path, and drew up at the door all panting, as if they had run a race. My wife stood waiting to receive me with a pale face, and a candle in her hand, which made her look paler still as the wind blew the flame about. "He is sleeping," she said in a whisper, as if her voice might wake him. And I replied, when I could find my voice, also in a whisper, as though the jingling of the horses' furniture and the sound of their hoofs must not have been more dangerous. I stood on the steps with her a moment, almost afraid to go in, now that I was here; and it seemed to me that I saw without observing, if I may say so, that the horses were unwilling to turn round, though their stables lay that way, or that the men were unwilling. These things occurred to me afterwards, though at the moment I was not capable of anything but to ask questions and to hear of the condition of the boy.

I looked at him from the door of his room, for we were afraid to go near, lest we should disturb that blessed sleep. It looked like actual sleep—not the lethargy into which my wife told me he would sometimes fall. She told me everything in the next room, which communicated with his, rising now and then and going to the door of communication; and in this there was much that was very startling and confusing to the mind. It appeared that ever since the winter began, since it was early dark and night had fallen before his return from school, he had been hearing voices among the ruins—at first only a groaning, he said, at which his pony was as much alarmed as he was, but by degrees a voice. The tears ran down my

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wife's cheeks as she described to me how he would start up in the night and cry out, "Oh, mother, let me in! Oh, mother, let me in!" with a pathos which rent her heart. And she sitting there all the time, only longing to do everything his heart could desire! But though she would try to soothe him, crying, "You are at home, my darling. I am here. Don't you know me? Your mother is here," he would only stare at her, and after a while spring up again with the same cry. At other times he would be quite reasonable, she said, asking eagerly when I was coming, but declaring that he must go with me as soon as I did so, "to let them in." "The doctor thinks his nervous system must have received a shock," my wife said. "Oh, Henry, can it be that we have pushed him on too much with his work—a delicate boy like Roland?—and what is his work in comparison with his health? Even you would think little of honours or prizes if it hurt the boy's health." Even I! as if I were an inhuman father sacrificing my child to my ambition. But I would not increase her trouble by taking any notice. After a while they persuaded me to lie down, to rest, and to eat—none of which things had been possible since I received their letters. The mere fact of being on the spot, of course, in itself was a great thing; and when I knew that I could be called in a moment, as soon as he was awake and wanted me, I felt capable, even in the dark, chill morning twilight, to snatch an hour or two's sleep. As it happened, I was so worn out with the strain of anxiety, and he so quieted and consoled by knowing I had come, that I was not disturbed till the afternoon, when the twilight had again settled down.

There was just daylight enough to see his face when I went to him; and what a change in a fortnight! He was paler and more worn, I thought, than even in those dreadful days in the plains before we left India. His hair seemed to me to have grown long and lank; his eyes were like blazing lights projecting out of his white face. He got hold of my hand in a cold and tremulous clutch, and waved to everybody to go away. "Go away—even mother," he said—"go away." This went to her heart, for she did not like that even I should have more of the boy's confidence than herself; but my wife has never been a woman to think of herself, and she left us alone. "Are they all gone?" he said eagerly. "They would not let me speak. The doctor treated me as if I were a fool. You know I am not a fool, papa."

"Yes, yes, my boy, I know; but you are ill, and quiet is so necessary. You are not only not a fool, Roland, but you are reasonable and understand. When you are ill you must deny yourself; you must not do everything that you might do being well."

He waved his thin hand with a sort of indignation. "Then, father, I am not ill," he cried. "Oh, I thought when you came you would not stop me—you would see the sense of it! What do you think is the matter with me, all of you? Simson is well enough, but he is only a doctor. What do you think is the matter with me? I am no more ill than you are. A doctor, of course, he thinks you are ill the moment he looks at you—that's what he's there for—and claps you into bed."

"Which is the best place for you at present, my dear boy."

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"I made up my mind," cried the little fellow, "that I would stand it till you came home. I said to myself, I won't frighten mother and the girls. But now, father," he cried, half jumping out of bed, "it's not illness—it's a secret."

His eyes shone so wildly, his face was so swept with strong feeling, that my heart sank within me. It could be nothing but fever that did it, and fever had been so fatal. I got him into my arms to put him back into bed. "Roland," I said, humouring the poor child, which I knew was the only way, "if you are going to tell me this secret to do any good, you know you must be quite quiet, and not excite yourself. If you excite yourself, I must not let you speak."

"Yes, father," said the boy. He was quiet directly, like a man, as if he quite understood. When I had laid him back on his pillow, he looked up at me with that grateful sweet look with which children, when they are ill, break one's heart, the water coming into his eyes in his weakness. "I was sure as soon as you were here you would know what to do," he said.

"To be sure, my boy. Now keep quiet, and tell it all out like a man." To think I was telling lies to my own child! for I did it only to humour him, thinking, poor little fellow, his brain was wrong.

"Yes, father. Father, there is someone in the park—someone that has been badly used."

"Hush, my dear; you remember, there is to be no excitement. Well, who is this somebody, and who has been ill-using him? We will soon put a stop to that."

"Ah," cried Roland, "but it is not so easy as you think. I don't know who it is. It is just a cry. Oh,

if you could hear it! It gets into my head in my sleep. I heard it as clear—as clear—and they think that I am dreaming—or raving perhaps,” the boy said, with a sort of disdainful smile.

This look of his perplexed me; it was less like fever than I thought. “Are you quite sure you have not dreamt it, Roland?” I said.

“Dreamt?—that!” He was springing up again when he suddenly bethought himself, and lay down flat with the same sort of smile on his face. “The pony heard it too,” he said. “She jumped as if she had been shot. If I had not grasped at the reins—for I was frightened, father——”

“No shame to you, my boy,” said I, though I scarcely knew why.

“If I hadn’t held to her like a leech, she’d have pitched me over her head, and she never drew breath till we were at the door. Did the pony dream it?” he said, with a soft disdain, yet indulgence for my foolishness. Then he added slowly: “It was only a cry the first time, and all the time before you went away. I wouldn’t tell you, for it was so wretched to be frightened. I thought it might be a hare or a rabbit snared, and I went in the morning and looked, but there was nothing. It was after you went I heard it really first, and this is what he says.” He raised himself on his elbow close to me, and looked me in the face. “‘Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!’” As he said the words a mist came over his face, the mouth quivered, the soft features all melted and changed, and when he had ended these pitiful words, dissolved in a shower of heavy tears.

Was it a hallucination? Was it the fever of the

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brain? Was it the disordered fancy caused by great bodily weakness? How could I tell? I thought it wisest to accept it as if it were all true.

"This is very touching, Roland," I said.

"Oh, if you had just heard it, father! I said to myself, if father heard it he would do something; but mamma, you know, she's given over to Simson, and that fellow's a doctor, and never thinks of anything but clapping you into bed."

"We must not blame Simson for being a doctor, Roland."

"No, no," said my boy, with delightful toleration and indulgence; "oh, no; that's the good of him—that's what he's for; I know that. But you—you are different; you are just father: and you'll do something—directly, papa, directly—this very night."

"Surely," I said. "No doubt it is some little lost child."

He gave me a sudden, swift look, investigating my face as though to see whether, after all, this was everything my eminence as "father" came to—no more than that? Then he got hold of my shoulder, clutching it with his thin hand: "Look here," he said, with a quiver in his voice; "suppose it wasn't—living at all!"

"My dear boy, how then could you have heard it?" I said.

He turned away from me with a pettish exclamation—"As if you didn't know better than that!"

"Do you want to tell me it is a ghost?" I said.

Roland withdrew his hand; his countenance assumed an aspect of great dignity and gravity; a slight quiver remained about his lips. "Whatever it

was—you always said we were not to call names. It was something—in trouble. Oh, father, in terrible trouble!”

“But, my boy,” I said—I was at my wits’ end—“if it was a child that was lost, or any poor human creature—but, Roland, what do you want me to do?”

“I should know if I was you,” said the child eagerly. “That is what I always said to myself—Father will know. Oh, papa, papa, to have to face it night after night, in such terrible, terrible trouble! and never to be able to do it any good. I don’t want to cry; it’s like a baby, I know; but what can I do else?—out there all by itself in the ruin, and nobody to help it. I can’t bear it, I can’t bear it!” cried my generous boy. And in his weakness he burst out, after many attempts to restrain it, into a great childish fit of sobbing and tears.

I do not know that I ever was in a greater perplexity in my life; and afterwards, when I thought of it, there was something comic in it too. It is bad enough to find your child’s mind possessed with the conviction that he has seen—or heard—a ghost. But that he should require you to go instantly and help that ghost, was the most bewildering experience that had ever come my way. I am a sober man myself, and not superstitious—at least any more than everybody is superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts; but I don’t deny, any more than other people, that there are stories which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament

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and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. I did my best to console my boy without giving any promise of this astonishing kind; but he was too sharp for me. He would have none of my caresses. With sobs breaking in at intervals upon his voice, and the rain-drops hanging on his eyelids, he yet returned to the charge.

"It will be there now—it will be there all the night. Oh think, papa, think, if it was me! I can't rest for thinking of it. Don't!" he cried, putting away my hand—"don't! You go and help it, and mother can take care of me."

"But, Roland, what can I do?"

My boy opened his eyes, which were large with weakness and fever, and gave me a smile such, I think, as sick children only know the secret of. "I was sure you would know as soon as you came. I always said—Father will know: and mother," he cried, with a softening of repose upon his face, his limbs relaxing, his form sinking with a luxurious ease in his bed—"mother can come and take care of me."

I called her, and saw him turn to her with the complete dependence of a child, and then I went away and left them, as perplexed a man as any in Scotland. I must say, however, I had this consolation, that my mind was greatly eased about Roland. He might be under a hallucination, but his head was clear enough, and I did not think him so ill as everybody else did. The girls were astonished even at the ease with which I took it. "How do you think he is?"

they said in a breath, coming round me, laying hold of me. "Not half so ill as I expected," I said; "not very bad at all." "Oh, papa, you are a darling," cried Agatha, kissing me, and crying upon my shoulder; while little Jeanie, who was as pale as Roland, clasped both her arms round mine, and could not speak at all. I knew nothing about it, not half so much as Simson: but they believed in me; they had a feeling that all would go right now. God is very good to you when your children look to you like that. It makes one humble, not proud. I was not worthy of it; and then I recollected that I had to act the part of a father to Roland's ghost, which made me almost laugh, though I might just as well have cried. It was the strangest mission that ever was entrusted to mortal man.

It was then I remembered suddenly the looks of the men when they turned to take the brougham to the stables in the dark that morning: they had not liked it, and the horses had not liked it. I remembered that even in my anxiety about Roland I had heard them tearing along the avenue back to the stables, and had made a memorandum mentally that I must speak of it. It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to go to the stables now and make a few inquiries. It is impossible to fathom the minds of rustics; there might be some devilry or practical joking, for anything I knew; or they might have some interest in getting up a bad reputation for the Brentwood avenue. It was getting dark by the time I went out, and nobody who knows the country will need to be told how black is the darkness of a November night under high laurel bushes and yew

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trees. I walked into the heart of the shrubberies two or three times, not seeing a step before me, till I came out upon the broader carriage-road, where the trees opened a little, and there was a faint grey glimmer of sky visible, under which the great limes and elms stood darkling like ghosts; but it grew black again as I approached the corner where the ruins lay. Both eyes and ears were on the alert, as may be supposed; but I could see nothing in the absolute gloom, and, so far as I can recollect, I heard nothing. Nevertheless there came a strong impression upon me that somebody was there. It is a sensation which most people have felt. I have seen when it has been strong enough to awake me out of sleep, the sense of someone looking at me. I suppose my imagination had been affected by Roland's story; and the mystery of the darkness is always full of suggestions. I stamped my feet violently on the gravel to rouse myself, and called out sharply, "Who's there?" Nobody answered, nor did I expect anyone to answer, but the impression had been made. I was so foolish that I did not like to look back, but went sideways, keeping an eye on the gloom behind. It was with great relief that I spied the light in the stables, making a sort of oasis in the darkness. I walked very quickly into the midst of that lighted and cheerful place, and thought the clank of the groom's pail one of the pleasantest sounds I had ever heard. The coachman was the head of this little colony, and it was to his house I went to pursue my investigations. He was a native of the district, and had taken care of the place in the absence of the family for years; it was impossible but that he must know everything that was going on, and all the

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traditions of the place. The men, I could see, eyed me anxiously when I thus appeared at such an hour among them, and followed me with their eyes to Jarvis's house, where he lived alone with his old wife, their children being all married and out in the world. Mrs. Jarvis met me with anxious questions. How was the poor young gentleman? but the others knew, I could see by their faces, that not even this was the foremost thing in my mind.

“Noises?—ou ay, there'll be noises—the wind in the trees, and the water souging down the glen. As for tramps, Cornel, no, there's little o' that kind o' cattle about here; and Merran at the gate's a careful body.” Jarvis moved about with some embarrassment from one leg to another as he spoke. He kept in the shade, and did not look at me more than he could help. Evidently his mind was perturbed, and he had reasons for keeping his own counsel. His wife sat by, giving him a quick look now and then, but saying nothing. The kitchen was very snug, and warm, and bright—as different as could be from the chill and mystery of the night outside.

“I think you are trifling with me, Jarvis,” I said.

“Triffin', Cornel? no me. What would I trifle for? If the deevil himsel was in the auld hoose, I have no interest in't one way or another——”

“Sandy, hold your peace!” cried his wife imperatively.

“And what am I to hold my peace for, wi' the Cornel standing there asking a' thae questions? I'm saying, if the deevil himsel——”

“And I'm telling ye hold your peace!” cried the

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woman, in great excitement. "Dark November weather and lang nights, and us that ken a' we ken. How daur ye name—a name that shouldna be spoken?" She threw down her stocking and got up, also in great agitation. "I tell't ye you never could keep it. It's no a thing that will hide; and the haill toun kens as weel as you or me. Tell the Cornel straight out—or see, I'll do it. I dinna hold wi' your secrets: and a secret that the haill toun kens!" She snapped her fingers with an air of large disdain. As for Jarvis, ruddy and big as he was, he shrank to nothing before this decided woman. He repeated to her two or three times her own adjuration, "Hold your peace!" then, suddenly changing his tone, cried out, "Tell him then, confound ye! I'll wash my hands o't. If a' the ghosts in Scotland were in the auld hoose, is that ony concern o' mine?"

After this I elicited without much difficulty the whole story. In the opinion of the Jarvises, and of everybody about, the certainty that the place was haunted was beyond all doubt. As Sandy and his wife warmed to the tale, one tripping up another in their eagerness to tell everything, it gradually developed as distinct a superstition as I ever heard, and not without poetry and pathos. How long it was since the voice had been heard first, nobody could tell with certainty. Jarvis's opinion was that his father, who had been coachman at Brentwood before him, had never heard anything about it, and that the whole thing had arisen within the last ten years, since the complete dismantling of the old house: which was a wonderfully modern date for a tale so well authenticated. According to these witnesses, and to several

whom I questioned afterwards, and who were all in perfect agreement, it was only in the months of November and December that "the visitation" occurred. During these months, the darkest of the year, scarcely a night passed without the recurrence of these inexplicable cries. Nothing, it was said, had ever been seen—at least nothing that could be identified. Some people, bolder or more imaginative than the others, had seen the darkness moving, Mrs. Jarvis said, with unconscious poetry. It began when night fell and continued, at intervals, till day broke. Very often it was only an inarticulate cry and moaning, but sometimes the words which had taken possession of my poor boy's fancy had been distinctly audible—"Oh, mother, let me in!" The Jarvises were not aware that there had ever been any investigation into it. The estate of Brentwood had lapsed into the hands of a distant branch of the family, who had lived but little there; and of the many people who had taken it, as I had done, few had remained through two Decembers. And 'nobody had taken the trouble to make a very close examination into the facts. "No, no," Jarvis said, shaking his head, "No, no, Cornel. Wha wad set themsels up for a laughin'-stock to a' the country-side, making a wark about a ghost? Naeboddy believes in ghosts. It bid to be the wind in the trees, the last gentleman said, or some effec' o' the water wrastlin' among the rocks. He said it was a' quite easy explained: but he gave up the hoose. And when you cam, Cornel, we were awfu' anxious you should never hear. What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for no-thing?"

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"Do you call my child's life nothing?" I said in the trouble of the moment, unable to restrain myself. "And instead of telling this all to me, you have told it to him—to a delicate boy, a child unable to sift evidence, or judge for himself, a tender-hearted young creature——"

I was walking about the room with an anger all the hotter that I felt it to be most likely quite unjust. My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers to a family who were content to risk other people's children and comfort rather than let the house lie empty. If I had been warned I might have taken precautions, or left the place, or sent Roland away, a hundred things which now I could not do; and here I was with my boy in a brain-fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a commonplace ghost-story! I paced about in high wrath, not seeing what I was to do; for, to take Roland away, even if he were able to travel, would not settle his agitated mind; and I feared even that a scientific explanation of refracted sound, or reverberation, or any other of the easy certainties with which we elder men are silenced, would have very little effect upon the boy.

"Cornel," said Jarvis solemnly, "and *she'll* bear me witness—the young gentleman never heard a word from me—no, nor from either groom or gardener; I'll gie ye my word for that. In the first place, he's no a lad that invites ye to talk. There are some that are, and some that arena. Some will draw ye on, till ye've tellt them a' the clatter of the toun, and a' ye ken, and whiles mair. But Maister Roland, his

mind's fu' of his books. He's aye civil and kind, and a fine lad; but no that sort. And ye see it's for a' our interest, Cornel, that you should stay at Brentwood. I took it upon me mysel to pass the word—'No a syllable to Maister Roland, nor to the young leddies—no a syllable.' The women-servants, that have little reason to be out at night, ken little or nothing about it. And some think it grand to have a ghost so long as they're no in the way of coming across it. If you had been tellt the story to begin with, maybe ye would have thought so yourself."

This was true enough, though it did not throw any light upon my perplexity. If we had heard of it to start with, it is possible that all the family would have considered the possession of a ghost a distinct advantage. It is the fashion of the times. We never think what a risk it is to play with young imaginations, but cry out, in the fashionable jargon, "A ghost!—nothing else was wanted to make it perfect." I should not have been above this myself. I should have smiled, of course, at the idea of the ghost at all, but then to feel that it was mine would have pleased my vanity. Oh, yes, I claim no exemption. The girls would have been delighted. I could fancy their eagerness, their interest, and excitement. No; if we had been told, it would have done no good—we should have made the bargain all the more eagerly, the fools that we are. "And there has been no attempt to investigate it," I said, "to see what it really is?"

"Eh, Cornel," said the coachman's wife, "wha would investigate, as ye call it, a thing that nobody believes in? Ye would be the laughing-stock of a'

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the country-side, as my man says."

"But you believe in it," I said, turning upon her hastily. The woman was taken by surprise. She made a step backward out of my way.

"Lord, Cornel, how ye frichten a body! Me!—there's awful strange things in this world. An unlearned person doesna ken what to think. But the minister and the gentry they just laugh in your face. Inquire into the thing that is not! Na, na, we just let it be."

"Come with me, Jarvis," I said hastily, "and we'll make an attempt at least. Say nothing to the men or to anybody. I'll come back after dinner, and we'll make a serious attempt to see what it is, if it is anything. If I hear it—which I doubt—you may be sure I shall never rest till I make it out. Be ready for me about ten o'clock."

"Me, Cornell" Jarvis said, in a faint voice. I had not been looking at him in my own preoccupation, but when I did so, I found that the greatest change had come over that fat and ruddy coachman. "Me, Cornell" he repeated, wiping the perspiration from his brow. His ruddy face hung in flabby folds, his knees knocked together, his voice seemed half extinguished in his throat. Then he began to rub his hands and smile upon me in a deprecating, imbecile way. "There's nothing I wouldna do to pleasure ye, Cornell" taking a step further back. "I'm sure *she* kens I've aye said I never had to do with a mair fair, weelspoken gentleman——" Here Jarvis came to a pause, again looking at me, rubbing his hands.

"Well?" I said.

"But eh, sir!" he went on, with the same imbecile

yet insinuating smile, "if ye'll reflect that I am no used to my feet. With a horse atween my legs, or the reins in my hand, I'm maybe nae worse than other men; but on fit, Cornel——. It's no the—bogles; but I've been cavalry, ye see," with a little hoarse laugh, "a' my life. To face a thing ye didna understand—on your feet, Cornel."

"Well, sir, if *I* do it," said I tartly, "why shouldn't you?"

"Eh, Cornel, there's an awfu' difference. In the first place, ye tramp about the haill country-side, and think naething of it; but a walk tires me mair than a hunard miles' drive: and then ye'e a gentleman, and do your ain pleasure; and you're no so auld as me; and it's for your ain bairn, ye see, Cornel; and then——"

"He believes in it, Cornel, and you dinna believe in it," the woman said.

"Will you come with me?" I said, turning to her.

She jumped back, upsetting her chair in her bewilderment. "Me!" with a scream, and then fell into a sort of hysterical laugh. "I wouldna say but what I would go; but what would the folk say to hear of Cornel Mortimer with an auld silly woman at his heels?"

The suggestion made me laugh too, though I had little inclination for it. "I'm sorry you have so little spirit, Jarvis," I said. "I must find someone else, I suppose."

Jarvis, touched by this, began to remonstrate, but I cut him short. My butler was a soldier who had been with me in India, and was not supposed to fear anything—man or devil—certainly not the former;

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and I felt that I was losing time. The Jarvises were too thankful to get rid of me. They attended me to the door with the most anxious courtesies. Outside, the two grooms stood close by, a little confused by my sudden exit. I don't know if perhaps they had been listening—at least standing as near as possible, to catch any scrap of the conversation. I waved my hand to them as I went past, in answer to their salutations, and it was very apparent to me that they also were glad to see me go.

And it will be thought very strange, but it would be weak not to add, that I myself, though bent on the investigation I have spoken of, pledged to Roland to carry it out, and feeling that my boy's health, perhaps his life, depended on the result of my inquiry—I felt the most unaccountable reluctance to pass these ruins on my way home. My curiosity was intense; and yet it was all my mind could do to pull my body along. I daresay the scientific people would describe it the other way, and attribute my cowardice to the state of my stomach. I went on; but if I had followed my impulse, I should have turned and bolted. Everything in me seemed to cry out against it; my heart thumped, my pulses all began, like sledge-hammers, beating against my ears and every sensitive part. It was very dark, as I have said; the old house, with its shapeless tower, loomed a heavy mass through the darkness, which was only not entirely so solid as itself. On the other hand, the great dark cedars of which we were so proud seemed to fill up the night. My foot strayed out of the path in my confusion and the gloom together, and I brought myself up with a cry as I felt myself knock against something solid.

What was it? The contact with hard stone and lime and prickly bramble-bushes restored me a little to myself. "Oh, it's only the old gable," I said aloud, with a little laugh to reassure myself. The rough feeling of the stones reconciled me. As I groped about thus, I shook off my visionary folly. What so easily explained as that I should have strayed from the path in the darkness? This brought me back to common existence, as if I had been shaken by a wise hand out of all the silliness of superstition. How silly it was, after all! What did it matter which path I took? I laughed again, this time with better heart—when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me. Close by me at my side, at my feet, there was a sigh. No, not a groan, not a moaning, not anything so tangible—a perfectly soft, faint, inarticulate sigh. I sprang back, and my heart stopped beating. Mistaken! no, mistake was impossible. I heard it as clearly as I hear myself speak; a long soft, weary sigh, as if drawn to the utmost, and emptying out a load of sadness that filled the breast. To hear this in the solitude, in the dark, in the night (though it was still early), had an effect which I cannot describe. I feel it now—something cold creeping over me, up into my hair, and down to my feet, which refused to move. I cried out, with a trembling voice, "Who is there?" as I had done before—but there was no reply.

I got home I don't quite know how; but in my mind there was no longer any indifference as to the thing, whatever it was, that haunted these ruins. My scepticism disappeared like a mist. I was as firmly

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determined that there was something as Roland was. I did not for a moment pretend to myself that it was possible I could be deceived; there were movements and noises which I understood all about, cracklings of small branches in the frost, and little rolls of gravel on the path, such as have a very eerie sound sometimes, and perplex you with wonder as to who has done it, *when there is no real mystery*; but I assure you all these little movements of nature don't affect you one bit *when there is something*. I understood *them*. I did not understand the sigh. That was not simple nature; there was meaning in it—feeling, the soul of a creature invisible. This is the thing that human nature trembles at—a creature invisible, yet with sensations, feelings, a power somehow of expressing itself. I had not the same sense of unwillingness to turn my back upon the scene of the mystery which I had experienced in going to the stables; but I almost ran home, impelled by eagerness to get everything done that had to be done in order to apply myself to finding it out. Bagley was in the hall as usual when I went in. He was always there in the afternoon, always with the appearance of perfect occupation, yet, so far as I know, never doing anything. The door was open, so that I hurried in without any pause, breathless; but the sight of his calm regard, as he came to help me off with my overcoat, subdued me in a moment. Anything out of the way, anything incomprehensible, faded to nothing in the presence of Bagley. You saw and wondered how *he* was made: the parting of his hair, the tie of his white neckcloth, the fit of his trousers, all perfect as works of art; but you could see how they were done, which

makes all the difference. I flung myself upon him, so to speak, without waiting to note the extreme unlikeness of the man to anything of the kind I meant. "Bagley," I said, "I want you to come out with me to-night to watch for——"

"Poachers, Colonel," he said, a gleam of pleasure running all over him.

"No, Bagley; a great deal worse," I cried.

"Yes, Colonel; at what hour, sir?" the man said; but then I had not told him what it was.

It was ten o'clock when we set out. All was perfectly quiet indoors. My wife was with Roland, who had been quite calm, she said, and who (though, no doubt, the fever must run its course) had been better since I came. I told Bagley to put on a thick great-coat over his evening coat, and did the same myself—with strong boots; for the soil was like a sponge, or worse. Talking to him, I almost forgot what we were going to do. It was darker even than it had been before, and Bagley kept very close to me as we went along. I had a small lantern in my hand, which gave us a partial guidance. We had come to the corner where the path turns. On one side was the bowling-green, which the girls had taken possession of for their croquet-ground—a wonderful enclosure surrounded by high hedges of holly, three hundred years old and more; on the other, the ruins. Both were black as night; but before we got so far, there was a little opening in which we could just discern the trees and the lighter line of the road. I thought it best to pause there and take breath. "Bagley," I said, "there is something about these ruins I don't understand. It is there I am going. Keep your eyes

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open and your wits about you. Be ready to pounce upon any stranger you see—anything, man or woman. Don't hurt, but seize—anything you see." "Colonel," said Bagley, with a little tremor in his breath, "they do say there's things there—as is neither man nor woman." There was no time for words. "Are you game to follow me, my man? that's the question," I said. Bagley fell in without a word, and saluted. I knew then I had nothing to fear.

We went, so far as I could guess, exactly as I had come, when I heard that sigh. The darkness, however, was so complete that all marks, as of trees or paths, disappeared. One moment we felt our feet on gravel, another sinking noiselessly into the slippery grass, that was all. I had shut up my lantern, not wishing to scare anyone, whoever it might be. Bagley followed, it seemed to me, exactly in my footsteps as I made my way, as I supposed, towards the mass of the ruined house. We seemed to take a long time groping along seeking this; the squash of the wet soil under our feet was the only thing that marked our progress. After a while I stood still to see, or rather feel, where we were. The darkness was very still, but no stiller than is usual in a winter's night. The sounds I have mentioned—the crackling of twigs, the roll of a pebble, the sound of some rustle in the dead leaves, or creeping creature on the grass—were audible when you listened, all mysterious enough when your mind is disengaged, but to me cheering now as signs of the livingness of nature, even in the death of the frost. As we stood still there came up from the trees in the glen the prolonged hoot of an owl. Bagley started with alarm, being in

a state of general nervousness, and not knowing what he was afraid of. But to me the sound was encouraging and pleasant, being so comprehensible. "An owl," I said, under my breath. "Y—es, Colonel," said Bagley, his teeth chattering. We stood still about five minutes, while it broke into the still brooding of the air, the sound widening out in circles, dying upon the darkness. This sound, which is not a cheerful one, made me almost gay. It was natural, and relieved the tension of the mind. I moved on with new courage, my nervous excitement calming down.

When all at once, quite suddenly, close to us, at our feet, there broke out a cry. I made a spring backwards in the first moment of surprise and horror, and in doing so came sharply against the same rough masonry and brambles that had struck me before. This new sound came upwards from the ground—a low, moaning, wailing voice, full of suffering and pain. The contrast between it and the hoot of the owl was indescribable; the one with a wholesome wildness and naturalness that hurt nobody—the other, a sound that made one's blood curdle, full of human misery. With a great deal of fumbling—for in spite of everything I could do to keep up my courage my hands shook—I managed to remove the slide of my lantern. The light leaped out like something living, and made the place visible in a moment. We were what would have been inside the ruined building had anything remained but the gable-wall which I have described. It was close to us, the vacant doorway in it going out straight into the blackness outside. The light showed the bit of wall, the ivy

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glistening upon it in clouds of dark green, the bramble-branches waving, and below, the open door—a door that led to nothing. It was from this the voice came which died out just as the light flashed upon this strange scene. There was a moment's silence, and then it broke forth again. The sound was so near, so penetrating, so pitiful, that, on the nervous start I gave, the light fell out of my hand. As I groped for it in the dark my hand was clutched by Bagley, who I think must have dropped upon his knees; but I was too much perturbed myself to think much of this. He clutched at me in the confusion of his terror, forgetting all his usual decorum. "For God's sake, what is it, sir?" he gasped. If I yielded, there was evidently an end of both of us. "I can't tell," I said, "any more than you; that's what we've got to find out: up, man, up!" I pulled him to his feet. "Will you go round and examine the other side, or will you stay here with the lantern?" Bagley gasped at me with a face of horror. "Can't we stay together, Colonel?" he said—his knees were trembling under him. I pushed him against the corner of the wall, and put the light into his hands. "Stand fast till I come back; shake yourself together, man; let nothing pass you," I said. The voice was within two or three feet of us, of that there could be no doubt.

I went myself to the other side of the wall, keeping close to it. The light shook in Bagley's hand, but, tremulous though it was, shone out through the vacant door, one oblong block of light marking all the crumbling corners and hanging masses of foliage. Was that something dark huddled in a heap by the

side of it? I pushed forward across the light in the doorway, and fell upon it with my hands; but it was only a juniper bush growing close against the wall. Meanwhile, the sight of my figure crossing the doorway had brought Bagley's nervous excitement to a height; he flew at me, gripping my shoulder. "I've got him, Colonel! I've got him!" he cried, with a voice of sudden exultation. He thought it was a man, and was at once relieved. But at that moment the voice burst forth again between us, at our feet—more close to us than any separate being could be. He dropped off from me, and fell against the wall, his jaw dropping as if he were dying. I suppose, at the same moment, he saw that it was me whom he had clutched. I, for my part, had scarcely more command of myself. I snatched the light out of his hand, and flashed it all about me wildly. Nothing—the juniper bush which I thought I had never seen before, the heavy growth of the glistening ivy, the brambles waving. It was close to my ears now, crying, crying, pleading as if for life. Either I heard the same words Roland had heard, or else, in my excitement, his imagination got possession of mine. The voice went on, growing into distinct articulation, but wavering about, now from one point, now from another, as if the owner of it were moving slowly back and forward—"Mother! mother!" and then an outburst of wailing. As my mind steadied, getting accustomed (as one's mind gets accustomed to anything), it seemed to me as if some uneasy, miserable creature was pacing up and down before a closed door. Sometimes—but that must have been excitement—I thought I heard a sound like knocking, and

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then another burst, "Oh, mother! mother!" All this close, close to the space where I was standing with my lantern—now before me, now behind me: a creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.

"Do you hear it, Bagley? do you hear what it is saying?" I cried, stepping in through the doorway. He was lying against the wall—his eyes glazed, half dead with terror. He made a motion of his lips as if to answer me, but no sounds came; then lifted his hand with a curious imperative movement as if ordering me to be silent and listen. And how long I did so I cannot tell. It began to have an interest, an exciting hold upon me, which I could not describe. It seemed to call up visibly a scene anyone could understand—a something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro; sometimes the voice dropped, as if throwing itself down—sometimes wandered off a few paces, growing sharp and clear. "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, mother, let me in! oh, let me in!" every word was clear to me. No wonder the boy had gone wild with pity. I tried to steady my mind upon Roland, upon his conviction that I could do something, but my head swam with the excitement, even when I partially overcame the terror. At last the words died away, and there was a sound of sobs and moaning. I cried out, "In the name of God who are you?" with a kind of feeling in my mind that to use the name of God was profane, seeing that I did not believe in ghosts or anything supernatural; but I did it all the same, and waited, my heart giving a leap of terror lest there should be a reply. Why this

should have been I cannot tell, but I had a feeling that if there was an answer it would be more than I could bear. But there was no answer; the moaning went on, and then, as if it had been real, the voice rose, a little higher again, the words recommenced, "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!" with an expression that was heart-breaking to hear.

As if it had been real! What do I mean by that? I suppose I got less alarmed as the thing went on. I began to recover the use of my senses—I seemed to explain it all to myself by saying that this had once happened, that it was a recollection of a real scene. Why there should have seemed something quite satisfactory and composing in this explanation I cannot tell, but so it was. I began to listen almost as if it had been a play, forgetting Bagley, who, I almost think, had fainted, leaning against the wall. I was startled out of this strange spectatorship that had fallen upon me by the sudden rush of something which made my heart jump once more, a large black figure in the doorway waving its arms. "Come in! come in! come in!" it shouted out hoarsely at the top of a deep bass voice, and then poor Bagley fell down senseless across the threshold. He was less sophisticated than I—he had not been able to bear it any longer. I took him for something supernatural, as he took me, and it was some time before I awoke to the necessities of the moment. I remembered only after, that from the time I began to give my attention to the man, I heard the other voice no more. It was some time before I brought him to. It must have been a strange scene; the lantern making a luminous spot in the darkness, the man's white face lying on

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the black earth, I over him, doing what I could for him. Probably I should have been thought to be murdering him had anyone seen us. When at last I succeeded in pouring a little brandy down his throat he sat up and looked about him wildly. "What's up?" he said; then recognizing me, tried to struggle to his feet with a faint "Beg your pardon, Colonel." I got him home as best I could, making him lean upon my arm. The great fellow was as weak as a child. Fortunately he did not for some time remember what had happened. From the time Bagley fell the voice had stopped, and all was still.

"You've got an epidemic in your house, Colonel," Simson said to me next morning. "What's the meaning of it all? Here's your butler raving about a voice. This will never do, you know; and so far as I can make out, you are in it too."

"Yes, I am in it, doctor. I thought I had better speak to you. Of course you are treating Roland all right—but the boy is not raving, he is as sane as you or me. It's all true."

"As sane as—I—or you. I never thought the boy insane. He's got cerebral excitement, fever. I don't know what you've got. There's something very queer about the look of your eyes."

"Come," said I, "you can't put us all to bed, you know. You had better listen and hear the symptoms in full."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, but he listened to me patiently. He did not believe a word of the story, that was clear; but he heard it all from beginning to end. "My dear fellow," he said, "the

boy told me just the same. It's an epidemic. When one person falls a victim to this sort of thing, it's as safe as can be—there's always two or three."

"Then how do you account for it?" I said.

"Oh, account for it!—that's a different matter; there's no accounting for the freaks our brains are subject to. If it's delusion; if it's some trick of the echoes or the winds—some phonetic disturbance or other——"

"Come with me to-night, and judge for yourself," I said.

Upon this he laughed aloud, then said, "That's not such a bad idea; but it would ruin me for ever if it were known that John Simson was ghost-hunting."

"There it is," said I; "you dart down on us who are unlearned with your phonetic disturbances, but you daren't examine what the thing really is for fear of being laughed at. That's science!"

"It's not science—it's common sense," said the doctor. "The thing has delusion on the front of it. It is encouraging an unwholesome tendency even to examine. What good could come of it? Even if I am convinced, I shouldn't believe."

"I should have said so yesterday; and I don't want you to be convinced or to believe," said I. "If you prove it to be a delusion, I shall be very much obliged to you for one. Come; somebody must go with me."

"You are cool," said the doctor. "You've disabled this poor fellow of yours, and made him—on that point—a lunatic for life; and now you want to disable me. But for once, I'll do it. To save appearance, if you'll give me a bed, I'll come over after my last rounds."

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It was agreed that I should meet him at the gate, and that we should visit the scene of last night's occurrences before we came to the house, so that nobody might be the wiser. It was scarcely possible to hope that the cause of Bagley's sudden illness should not somehow steal into the knowledge of the servants at least, and it was better that all should be done as quietly as possible. The day seemed to me a very long one. I had to spend a certain part of it with Roland, which was a terrible ordeal for me—for what could I say to the boy? The improvement continued, but he was still in a very precarious state, and the trembling vehemence with which he turned to me when his mother left the room filled me with alarm. "Father!" he said quietly. "Yes, my boy; I am giving my best attention to it—all is being done that I can do. I have not come to any conclusion—yet. I am neglecting nothing you said." I cried. What I could not do was to give his active mind any encouragement to dwell upon the mystery. It was a hard predicament, for some satisfaction had to be given him. He looked at me very wistfully, with the great blue eyes which shone so large and brilliant out of his white and worn face. "You must trust me," I said. "Yes, father. Father understands," he said to himself, as if to soothe some inward doubt. I left him as soon as I could. He was about the most precious thing I had on earth, and his health my first thought; but yet somehow, in the excitement of this other subject, I put that aside, and preferred not to dwell upon Roland, which was the most curious part of it all.

That night at eleven I met Simson at the gate. He

had come by train, and I let him in gently myself. I had been so much absorbed in the coming experiment that I passed the ruins in going to meet him, almost without thought, if you can understand that. I had my lantern; and he showed me a coil of taper which he had ready for use. "There is nothing like light," he said, in his scoffing tone. It was a very still night, scarcely a sound, but not so dark. We could keep the path without difficulty as we went along. As we approached the spot we could hear a low moaning, broken occasionally by a bitter cry. "Perhaps that is your voice," said the doctor; "I thought it must be something of the kind. That's a poor brute caught in some of these infernal traps of yours; you'll find it among the bushes somewhere." I said nothing. I felt no particular fear, but a triumphant satisfaction in what was to follow. I led him to the spot where Bagley and I had stood on the previous night. All was silent as a winter night could be—so silent that we heard far off the sound of the horses in the stables, the shutting of a window at the house. Simson lighted his taper and went peering about, poking into all the corners. We looked like two conspirators lying in wait for some unfortunate traveller; but not a sound broke the quiet. The moaning had stopped before we came up; a star or two shone over us in the sky, looking down as if surprised at our strange proceedings. Dr. Simson did nothing but utter subdued laughs under his breath. "I thought as much," he said. "It is just the same with tables and all other kinds of ghostly apparatus; a sceptic's presence stops everything. When I am present nothing ever comes off. How long do you

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think it will be necessary to stay here? Oh, I don't complain; only, when *you* are satisfied, *I* am—quite."

I will not deny that I was disappointed beyond measure by this result. It made me look like a credulous fool. It gave the doctor such a pull over me as nothing else could. I should point all his morals for years to come, and his materialism, his scepticism, would be increased beyond endurance. "It seems, indeed," I said, "that there is to be no——" "Manifestation," he said, laughing; "that is what all the mediums say. No manifestations, in consequence of the presence of an unbeliever." His laugh sounded very uncomfortable to me in the silence; and it was now near midnight. But that laugh seemed the signal; before it died away the moaning we had heard before was resumed. It started from some distance off, and came towards us, nearer and nearer, like someone walking along and moaning to himself. There could be no idea now that it was a hare caught in a trap. The approach was slow, like that of a weak person with little halts and pauses. We heard it coming along the grass straight towards the vacant doorway. Simson had been a little startled by the first sound. He said hastily, "That child has no business to be out so late." But he felt, as well as I, that this was no child's voice. As it came nearer, he grew silent, and, going to the doorway with his taper, stood looking out towards the sound. The taper being unprotected blew about in the night air, though there was scarcely any wind. I threw the light of my lantern steady and white across the same space. It was a blaze of light in the midst of the blackness. A little

icy thrill had gone over me at the first sound, but as it came close, I confess that my only feeling was satisfaction. The scoffer could scoff no more. The light touched his own face, and showed a very perplexed countenance. If he was afraid, he concealed it with great success, but he was perplexed. And then all that had happened on the previous night was enacted once more. It fell strangely upon me with a sense of repetition. Every cry, every sob seemed the same as before. I listened almost without any emotion at all in my own person, thinking of its effect upon Simson. He maintained a very bold front on the whole. All that coming and going of the voice was, if our ears could be trusted, exactly in front of the vacant, blank doorway, blazing full of light, which caught and shone in the glistening leaves of the great hollies at a little distance. Not a rabbit could have crossed the turf without being seen; but there was nothing. After a time, Simson, with a certain caution and bodily reluctance, as it seemed to me, went out with his roll of taper into this space. His figure showed against the holly in full outline. Just at this moment the voice sank, as was its custom, and seemed to fling itself down at the door. Simson recoiled violently, as if someone had come up against him, then turned, and held his taper low as if examining something. "Do you see anybody?" I cried in a whisper, feeling the chill of nervous panic steal over me at this action. "It's nothing but a —— confounded juniper bush," he said. This I knew very well to be nonsense, for the juniper bush was on the other side. He went about after this round and round poking his taper everywhere, then returned to me on

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the inner side of the wall. He scoffed no longer; his face was contracted and pale. "How long does this go on?" he whispered to me, like a man who does not wish to interrupt someone who is speaking. I had become too much perturbed myself to remark whether the successions and changes of the voice were the same as last night. It suddenly went out in the air almost as he was speaking, with a soft reiterated sob dying away. If there had been anything to be seen, I should have said that the person was at that moment crouching on the ground close to the door.

We walked home very silent afterwards. It was only when we were in sight of the house that I said, "What do you think of it?" "I can't tell what to think of it," he said quickly. He took—though he was a very temperate man—not the claret I was going to offer him, but some brandy from the tray, and swallowed it almost undiluted. "Mind you, I don't believe a word of it," he said, when he had lighted his candle; "but I can't tell what to think," he turned round to add, when he was half-way upstairs.

All of this, however, did me no good with the solution of my problem. I was to help this weeping, sobbing thing, which was already to me as distinct a personality as anything I knew—or what should I say to Roland? It was on my heart that my boy would die if I could not find some way of helping this creature. You may be surprised that I should speak of it in this way. I did not know if it was man or woman; but I no more doubted that it was a soul in pain than I doubted my own being; and it was my business to

soothe this pain—to deliver it, if that was possible. Was ever such a task given to an anxious father trembling for his only boy? I felt in my heart, fantastic as it may appear, that I must fulfil this somehow, or part with my child; and you may conceive that rather than do that I was ready to die. But even my dying would not have advanced me—unless by bringing me into the same world with that seeker at the door.

Next morning Simson was out before breakfast, and came in with evident signs of the damp grass on his boots, and a look of worry and weariness, which did not say much for the night he had passed. He improved a little after breakfast, and visited his two patients, for Bagley was still an invalid. I went out with him on his way to the train, to hear what he had to say about the boy. "He is going on very well," he said; "there are no complications as yet. But mind you, that's not a boy to be trifled with, Mortimer. Not a word to him about last night." I had to tell him then of my last interview with Roland, and of the impossible demand he had made upon me—by which, though he tried to laugh, he was much decomposed, as I could see. "We must just perjure ourselves all round," he said, "and swear you exorcized it"; but the man was too kind-hearted to be satisfied with that. "It's frightfully serious for you, Mortimer. I can't laugh as I should like to. I wish I saw a way out of it, for your sake. By the way," he added shortly, "didn't you notice that juniper bush on the left-hand side?" "There was one on the right hand of the door. I noticed you made that mistake

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last night." "Mistake!" he cried, with a curious low laugh, pulling up the collar of his coat as though he felt the cold—"there's no juniper there this morning, left or right. Just go and see." As he stepped into the train a few minutes after, he looked back upon me and beckoned me for a parting word. "I'm coming back to-night," he said.

I don't think I had any feeling about this as I turned away from that common bustle of the railway which made my private preoccupations feel so strangely out of date. There had been a distinct satisfaction in my mind before that his scepticism had been so entirely defeated. But the more serious part of the matter pressed upon me now. I went straight from the railway to the manse, which stood on a little plateau on the side of the river opposite to the woods of Brentwood. The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience—a man who had "come across," in the course of his life, most people of note that had ever been in Scotland—and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration with which old men, who are good men, are generally endowed. He was old-fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions about the Confession of Faith—but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. He received me with a cordial welcome. "Come away, Colonel Mortimer," he said; "I'm all the more glad to see you, that I feel it's a

good sign for the boy. He's doing well?—God be praised—and the Lord bless him and keep him. He has many a poor body's prayers—and that can do nobody harm."

"He will need them all, Dr. Moncrieff," I said, "and your counsel too." And I told him the story—more than I had told Simson. The old clergyman listened to me with many suppressed exclamations, and at the end the water stood in his eyes.

"That's just beautiful," he said. "I do not mind to have heard anything like it; it's as fine as Burns when he wished deliverance to one—that is prayed for in no kirk. Ay, ay! so he would have you console the poor lost spirit? God bless the boy! There's something more than common in that, Colonel Mortimer. And also the faith of him in his father!—I would like to put that into a sermon." Then the old gentleman gave me an alarmed look, and said, "No, no; I was not meaning a sermon; but I must write it down for the *Children's Record*." I saw the thought that passed through his mind. Either he thought, or he feared I would think, of a funeral sermon. You may believe this did not make me more cheerful.

I can scarcely say that Dr. Moncrieff gave me any advice. How could anyone advise on such a subject? But he said, "I think I'll come too. I'm an old man; I'm less liable to be frightened than those that are further off the world unseen. It behoves me to think of my own journey there. I've no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I'll come too: and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do."

This gave me a little comfort—more than Simson had given me. To be clear about the cause of it was

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not my grand desire. It was another thing that was in my mind—my boy. As for the poor soul at the open door, I had no more doubt, as I have said, of its existence than I had of my own. It was no ghost to me. I knew the creature, and it was in trouble. That was my feeling about it, as it was Roland's. To hear it first was a great shock to my nerves, but not now; a man will get accustomed to anything. But to do something for it was the great problem; how was I to be serviceable to a being that was invisible, that was mortal no longer? "Maybe at the moment the Lord will put it into our heads." This is very old-fashioned phraseology, and a week before, most likely, I should have smiled (though always with kindness) at Dr. Moncrieff's credulity; but there was a great comfort, whether rational or otherwise I cannot say, in the mere sound of the words.

The road to the station and the village lay through the glen—not by the ruins; but though the sunshine and the fresh air, and the beauty of the trees, and the sound of the water were all very soothing to the spirits, my mind was so full of my own subject that I could not refrain from turning to the right hand as I got to the top of the glen, and going straight to the place which I may call the scene of all my thoughts. It was lying full in the sunshine, like all the rest of the world. The ruined gable looked due east, and in the present aspect of the sun the light streamed down through the doorway as our lantern had done, throwing a flood of light upon the damp grass beyond. There was a strange suggestion in the open door—so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity—all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that

semblance of an enclosure—that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in—to nothing: or be kept out—by nothing! You could not dwell upon it, or it made your brain go round. I remembered, however, what Simson said about the juniper, with a little smile on my own mind as to the inaccuracy of recollection, which even a scientific man will be guilty of. I could see now the light of my lantern gleaming upon the wet glistening surface of the spiky leaves at the right hand—and he ready to go to the stake for it that it was the left! I went round to make sure. And then I saw what he had said. Right or left there was no juniper at all. I was confounded by this, though it was entirely a matter of detail: nothing at all: a bush of brambles waving, the grass growing up to the very walls. But after all, though it gave me a shock for a moment, what did that matter? There were marks as if a number of footsteps had been up and down in front of the door; but these might have been our steps; and all was bright, and peaceful, and still. I poked about the other ruin—the larger ruins of the old house—for some time, as I had done before. There were marks upon the grass here and there, I could not call them footsteps, all about; but that told for nothing one way or another. I had examined the ruined rooms closely the first day. They were half filled up with soil and *débris*, withered brackens and bramble—no refuge for anyone there. It vexed me that Jarvis should see me coming from that spot when he came up to me for his orders. I don't know whether my nocturnal expeditions had got wind among the servants. But there was a signifi-

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cant look in his face. Something in it I felt was like my own sensation when Simson in the midst of his scepticism was struck dumb. Jarvis felt satisfied that his veracity had been put beyond question. I never spoke to a servant of mine in such a peremptory tone before. I sent him away "with a flea in his lug," as the man described it afterwards. Interference of any kind was intolerable to me at such a moment.

But what was strangest of all was, that I could not face Roland. I did not go up to his room as I would have naturally done at once. This the girls could not understand. They saw there was some mystery in it. "Mother has gone to lie down," Agatha said; "he has had such a good night." "But he wants you so, papa!" cried little Jeanie, always with her two arms embracing mine in a pretty way she had. I was obliged to go at last—but what could I say? I could only kiss him, and tell him to keep still—that I was doing all I could. There is something mystical about the patience of a child. "It will come all right, won't it, father?" he said. "God grant it may! I hope so, Roland." "Oh yes, it will come all right." Perhaps he understood that in the midst of my anxiety I could not stay with him as I should have done otherwise. But the girls were more surprised than it is possible to describe. They looked at me with wondering eyes. "If I were ill, papa, and you only stayed with me a moment, I should break my heart," said Agatha. But the boy had a sympathetic feeling. He knew that of my own will I would not have done it. I shut myself up in the library, where I could not rest, but kept pacing up and down like a caged beast. What could I do? and if I could do nothing, what would

become of my boy? These were the questions that, without ceasing, pursued each other through my mind.

Simson came out to dinner, and when the house was all still, and most of the servants in bed, we went out and met Dr. Moncrieff, as we had appointed, at the head of the glen. Simson, for his part, was disposed to scoff at the doctor. "If there are to be any spells, you know, I'll cut the whole concern," he said. I did not make him any reply. I had not invited him; he could go or come as he pleased. He was very talkative, far more than suited my humour, as we went on. "One thing is certain, you know, there must be some human agency", he said. "It is all bosh about apparitions. I never have investigated the laws of sound to any great extent, and there's a great deal in ventriloquism that we don't know much about." "If it's the same to you," I said, "I wish you'd keep all that to yourself, Simson. It doesn't suit my state of mind." "Oh, I hope I know how to respect idiosyncrasy," he said. The very tone of his voice irritated me beyond measure. These scientific fellows, I wonder people put up with them as they do, when you have no mind for their cold-blooded confidence. Dr. Moncrieff met us about eleven o'clock, the same time as on the previous night. He was a large man, with a venerable countenance and white hair—old, but in full vigour, and thinking less of a cold night walk than many a younger man. He had his lantern as I had. We were fully provided with means of lighting the place, and we were all of us resolute men. We had a rapid consultation as we went up, and the result was that we divided to different posts. Dr. Moncrieff remained

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inside the wall—if you can call that inside where there was no wall but one. Simson placed himself on the side next the ruins, so as to intercept any communication with the old house, which was what his mind was fixed upon. I was posted on the other side. To say that nothing could come near without being seen was self-evident. It had been so also on the previous night. Now, with our three lights in the midst of the darkness, the whole place seemed illuminated. Dr. Moncrieff's lantern, which was a large one, without any means of shutting up—an old-fashioned lantern with a pierced and ornamental top—shone steadily, the rays shooting out of it upward into the gloom. He placed it on the grass, where the middle of the room, if this had been a room, would have been. The usual effect of the light streaming out of the doorway was prevented by the illumination which Simson and I on either side supplied. With these differences, everything seemed as on the previous night.

And what occurred was exactly the same, with the same air of repetition, point for point, as I had formerly remarked. I declare that it seemed to me as if I were pushed against, put aside, by the owner of the voice as he paced up and down in his trouble—though these are perfectly futile words, seeing that the stream of light from my lantern, and that from Simson's taper, lay broad and clear, without a shadow, without the smallest break, across the entire breadth of the grass. I had ceased even to be alarmed, for my part. My heart was rent with pity and trouble—pity for the poor suffering human creature that moaned and pleaded so, and trouble for myself and

my boy. God! if I could not find any help—and what help could I find?—Roland would die.

We were all perfectly still till the first outburst was exhausted, as I knew (by experience) it would be. Dr. Moncrieff, to whom it was new, was quite motionless on the other side of the wall, as we were in our places. My heart had remained almost at its usual beating during the voice. I was used to it; it did not rouse all my pulses as it did at first. But just as it threw itself sobbing at the door (I cannot use other words), there suddenly came something which sent the blood coursing through my veins and my heart into my mouth. It was a voice inside the wall—the minister's well-known voice. I would have been prepared for it in any kind of adjuration, but I was not prepared for what I heard. It came out with a sort of stammering, as if too much moved for utterance. "Willie, Willie! Oh, God preserve us! is it you?"

These simple words had an effect upon me that the voice of the invisible creature had ceased to have. I thought the old man, whom I had brought into this danger, had gone mad with terror. I made a dash round to the other side of the wall, half crazed myself with the thought. He was standing where I had left him, his shadow thrown vague and large upon the grass by the lantern which stood at his feet. I lifted my own light to see his face as I rushed forward. He was very pale, his eyes wet and glistening, his mouth quivering with parted lips. He neither saw nor heard me. We that had gone through this experience before, had crouched towards each other to get a little strength to bear it. But he was not even aware that

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I was there. His whole being seemed absorbed in anxiety and tenderness. He held out his hands, which trembled, but it seemed to me with eagerness, not fear. He went on speaking all the time. "Willie, if it is you—and it's you, if it is not a delusion of Satan—Willie, lad! why come ye here frightening them that know you not? Why came ye not to me?"

He seemed to wait for an answer. When his voice ceased, his countenance, every line moving, continued to speak. Simson gave me another terrible shock, stealing into the open doorway with his light, as much awe-stricken, as wildly curious, as I. But the minister resumed, without seeing Simson, speaking to someone else. His voice took a tone of expostulation:

"Is this right to come here? Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No!—I forbid ye! I forbid ye!" cried the old man. The sobbing voice had begun to resume its cries. He made a step forward, calling out the last words in a voice of command. "I forbid ye! Cry out no more to man. Go home, ye wandering spirit! go home! Do you hear me?—me that christened ye, that have struggled with ye, that have wrestled for ye with the Lord!" Here the loud tones of his voice sank into tenderness. "And her too, poor woman! poor woman! her you are calling upon. She's no here. You'll find her with the Lord. Go there and seek her, not here. Do you hear me, lad? go after her there. He'll let you in, though it's late. Man, take heart! if you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's

gate, and no your poor mother's ruined door."

He stopped to get his breath: and the voice had stopped, not as it had done before, when its time was exhausted and all its repetitions said, but with a sobbing catch in the breath as if over-ruled. Then the minister spoke again, "Are you hearing me, Will? Oh, laddie, you've liked the beggarly elements all your days. Be done with them now. Go home to the Father—the Father! Are you hearing me?" Here the old man sank down upon his knees, his face raised upwards, his hands held up with a tremble in them, all white in the light in the midst of the darkness. I resisted as long as I could, though I cannot tell why—then I, too, dropped upon my knees. Simson all the time stood in the doorway, with an expression in his face such as words could not tell, his under lip dropped, his eyes wild, staring. It seemed to be to him, that image of blank ignorance and wonder, that we were praying. All the time the voice, with a low arrested sobbing, lay just where he was standing, as I thought.

"Lord," the minister said—"Lord, take him into Thy everlasting habitations. The mother he cries to is with Thee. Who can open to him but Thee? Lord, when is it too late for Thee, or what is too hard for Thee? Lord, let that woman there draw him inower! Let her draw him inower!"

I sprang forward to catch something in my arms that flung itself wildly within the door. The illusion was so strong, that I never paused till I felt my forehead graze against the wall and my hands clutch the ground—for there was nobody there to save from falling, as in my foolishness I thought. Simson held

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out his hand to me to help me up. He was trembling and cold, his lower lip hanging, his speech almost inarticulate. "It's gone," he said, stammering—"it's gone!" We leant upon each other for a moment, trembling so much both of us that the whole scene trembled as if it were going to dissolve and disappear; and yet as long as I live I will never forget it—the shining of the strange lights, the blackness all round, the kneeling figure with all the whiteness of the light concentrated on its white venerable head and uplifted hands. A strange solemn stillness seemed to close all round us. By intervals a single syllable, "Lord! Lord!" came from the old minister's lips. He saw none of us, nor thought of us. I never knew how long we stood, like sentinels guarding him at his prayers, holding our lights in a confused, dazed way, not knowing what we did. But at last he rose from his knees, and standing up at his full height, raised his arms, as the Scotch manner is at the end of a religious service, and solemnly gave the apostolical benediction—to what? to the silent earth, the dark woods, the wide breathing atmosphere—for we were but spectators gasping an Amen!

It seemed to me that it must be the middle of the night, as we all walked back. It was in reality very late. Dr. Moncrieff put his arm into mine. He walked slowly, with an air of exhaustion. It was as if we were coming from a deathbed. Something hushed and solemnized the very air. There was that sense of relief in it which there always is at the end of a death-struggle. And nature persistent, never daunted, came back in all of us, as we returned into the ways of life. We said nothing to each other,

indeed, for a time; but when we got clear of the trees and reached the opening near the house, where we could see the sky, Dr. Moncrieff himself was the first to speak. "I must be going," he said; "it's very late, I'm afraid. I will go down the glen, as I came."

"But not alone. I am going with you, doctor."

"Well, I will not oppose it. I am an old man, and agitation worries more than work. Yes; I'll be thankful of your arm. To-night, Colonel, you've done me more good turns than one."

I pressed his hand on my arm, not feeling able to speak. But Simson, who turned with us, and who had gone along all this time with his taper flaring, in entire unconsciousness, came to himself, apparently at the sound of our voices, and put out that wild little torch with a quick movement, as if of shame. "Let me carry your lantern," he said; "it is heavy." He recovered with a spring, and in a moment, from the awe-stricken spectator he had been, became himself, sceptical and cynical. "I should like to ask you a question," he said. "Do you believe in Purgatory, Doctor? It's not in the tenets of the Church, so far as I know."

"Sir," said Dr. Moncrieff, "an old man like me is sometimes not very sure what he believes. There is just one thing I am certain of—and that is the loving-kindness of God."

"But I thought that was in this life. I am no theologian——"

"Sir," said the old man again, with a tremor in him which I could feel going over all his frame, "if I saw a friend of mine within the gates of hell, I would not despair but his Father would take him by the

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hand still—if he cried like *yon*."

"I allow it is very strange—very strange. I cannot see through it. That there must be human agency, I feel sure. Doctor, what made you decide upon the person and the name?"

The minister put out his hand with the impatience which a man might show if he were asked how he recognized his brother. "Tuts!" he said, in familiar speech—then more solemnly, "how should I not recognize a person that I know better—far better—than I know you?"

"Then you saw the man?"

Dr. Moncrieff made no reply. He moved his hand again with a little impatient movement, and walked on, leaning heavily on my arm. And we went on for a long time without another word, threading the dark paths, which were steep and slippery with the damp of the winter. The air was very still—not more than enough to make a faint sighing in the branches, which mingled with the sound of the water to which we were descending. When we spoke again, it was about indifferent matters—about the height of the river, and the recent rains. We parted with the minister at his own door, where his old housekeeper appeared in great perturbation, waiting for him. "Eh me, minister! the young gentleman will be worse?" she cried.

"Far from that—better. God bless him!" Dr. Moncrieff said.

I think if Simson had begun again to me with his questions, I should have pitched him over the rocks as we returned up the glen; but he was silent, by a good inspiration. And the sky was clearer than it had

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been for many nights, shining high over the trees, with here and there a star faintly gleaming through the wilderness of dark and bare branches. The air, as I have said, was very soft in them, with a subdued and peaceful cadence. It was real, like every natural sound, and came to us like a hush of peace and relief. I thought there was a sound in it as of the breath of a sleeper, and it seemed clear to me that Roland must be sleeping, satisfied and calm. We went up to his room when we went in. There we found the complete hush of rest. My wife looked up out of a doze, and gave me a smile; "I think he is a great deal better: but you are very late," she said in a whisper, shading the light with her hand that the doctor might see his patient. The boy had got back something like his own colour. He woke as we stood all round his bed. His eyes had the happy half-awakened look of childhood, glad to shut again, yet pleased with the interruption and glimmer of the light. I stooped over him and kissed his forehead, which was moist and cool. "All is well, Roland," I said. He looked up at me with a glance of pleasure, and took my hand and laid his cheek upon it, and so went to sleep.

For some nights after, I watched among the ruins, spending all the dark hours up to midnight patrolling about the bit of wall which was associated with so many emotions; but I heard nothing, and saw nothing beyond the quiet course of nature: nor, so far as I am aware, has anything been heard again. Dr. Moncrieff gave me the history of the youth, whom he never hesitated to name. I did not ask,

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as Simson did, how he recognized him. He had been a prodigal—weak, foolish, easily imposed upon, and “led away,” as people say. All that we had heard had passed actually in life, the Doctor said. The young man had come home thus a day or two after his mother died—who was no more than the housekeeper in the old house—and distracted with the news, had thrown himself down at the door and called upon her to let him in. The old man could scarcely speak of it for tears. To me it seemed as if—heaven help us, how little do we know about anything!—a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature. I do not pretend to know how, but the repetition had struck me at the time as, in its terrible strangeness and incomprehensibility, almost mechanical—as if the unseen actor could not exceed or vary, but was bound to re-enact the whole. One thing that struck me, however, greatly, was the likeness between the old minister and my boy in the manner of regarding these strange phenomena. Dr. Moncrieff was not terrified, as I had been myself, and all the rest of us. It was no “ghost,” as I fear we all vulgarly considered it, to him—but a poor creature whom he knew under these conditions, just as he had known him in the flesh, having no doubt of his identity. And to Roland it was the same. This spirit in pain—if it was a spirit—this voice out of the unseen—was a poor fellow-creature in misery, to be succoured and helped out of his trouble, to my boy. He spoke to me quite frankly about it when he got better. “I knew father would find out some way,” he said. And this was when he was strong and well, and all idea that he

would turn hysterical or become a seer of visions had happily passed away.

I must add one curious fact which does not seem to me to have any relation to the above, but which Simson made great use of, as the human agency which he was determined to find somehow. We had examined the ruins very closely at the time of these occurrences; but afterwards, when all was over, as we went casually about them one Sunday afternoon in the idleness of that unemployed day, Simson with his stick penetrated an old window which had been entirely blocked up with fallen soil. He jumped down into it in great excitement, and called me to follow. There we found a little hole—for it was more a hole than a room—entirely hidden under the ivy ruins, in which there was a quantity of straw laid in a corner, as if someone had made a bed there, and some remains of crusts about the floor. Someone had lodged there, and not very long before, he made out; and that this unknown being was the author of all the mysterious sounds we heard he is convinced. "I told you it was human agency," he said triumphantly. He forgets, I suppose, how he and I stood with our lights seeing nothing, while the space between us was audibly traversed by something that could speak, and sob, and suffer. There is no argument with men of this kind. He is ready to get up a laugh against me on this slender ground. "I was puzzled myself—I could not make it out—but I always felt convinced human agency was at the bottom of it. And here it is—and a clever fellow he must have been," the Doctor says.

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Bagley left my service as soon as he got well. He assured me it was no want of respect; but he could not stand "them kind of things," and the man was so shaken and ghastly that I was glad to give him a present and let him go. For my own part, I made a point of staying out the time, two years, for which I had taken Brentwood; but I did not renew my tenancy. By that time we had settled, and found for ourselves a pleasant home of our own.

I must add that when the doctor defies me, I can always bring back gravity to his countenance, and a pause in his railing, when I remind him of the juniper bush. To me that was a matter of little importance. I could believe I was mistaken. I did not care about it one way or other; but on his mind the effect was different. The miserable voice, the spirit in pain, he could think of as the result of ventriloquism, or reverberation, or—anything you please: an elaborate prolonged hoax executed somehow by the tramp that had found a lodging in the old tower. But the juniper bush staggered him. Things have effects so different on the minds of different men.

BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



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THE REVEREND MURDOCH SOULIS was long minister of the moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale of Dule. A severe, bleak-faced old man, dreadful to his hearers, he dwelt in the last years of his life, without relative or servant or any human company, in the small and lonely manse under the Hanging Shaw. In spite of the iron composure of his features, his eye was wild, scared, and uncertain; and when he dwelt, in private admonition, on the future of the impenitent, it seemed as if his eyes pierced through the storms of time to the terrors of eternity. Many young persons, coming to prepare themselves against the season of the Holy Communion, were dreadfully affected by his talk. He had a sermon on 1 Peter, v. and 8, "The devil as a roaring lion," on the Sunday after every seventeenth of August, and he was accustomed to surpass himself upon that text both by the appalling nature of the matter and the terror of his bearing in the pulpit. The children were frightened into fits, and the old looked more than usually maracular, and were, all that day, full of those hints that Hamlet deprecated. The manse itself, where it stood by the water of Dule among some thick trees, with

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the Shaw overhanging it on the one side, and on the other many cold, moorish hill-tops rising toward the sky, had begun, at a very early period of Mr. Soulis's ministry, to be avoided in the dusk hours by all who valued themselves upon their prudence; and guidmen sitting at the clachan alehouse shook their heads together at the thought of passing late by that uncanny neighbourhood. There was one spot, to be more particular, which was regarded with especial awe. The manse stood between the highroad and the water of Dule, with a gable to each; its back was towards the kirktown of Balweary, nearly half a mile away; in front of it, a bare garden, hedged with thorn, occupied the land between the river and the road. The house was two stories high, with two large rooms on each. It opened not directly on the garden, but on a causewayed path, or passage, giving on the road on the one hand, and closed on the other by the tall willows and elders that bordered on the stream. And it was this strip of causeway that enjoyed among the young parishioners of Balweary so infamous a reputation. The minister walked there often after dark, sometimes groaning aloud in the instance of his unspoken prayers; and when he was from home, and the manse door was locked, the more daring school-boys ventured, with beating hearts, to "follow my leader" across that legendary spot.

This atmosphere of terror, surrounding, as it did, a man of God of spotless character and orthodoxy, was a common cause of wonder and subject of inquiry among the few strangers who were led by chance or business into that unknown, outlying country. But many even of the people of the parish

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were ignorant of the strange events which had marked the first year of Mr. Soulis's ministrations; and among those who were better informed, some were naturally reticent, and others shy of that particular topic. Now and again, only, one of the older folk would warm into courage over his third tumbler, and recount the cause of the minister's strange looks and solitary life.

Fifty years syne, when Mr. Soulis cam' first into Ba'weary, he was still a young man—a callant, the folk said—fu' o' book-learnin' an' grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi' nae leevin' experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi' his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill-supplied. It was before the days o' the moderates—weary fa' them; but ill things are like guid—they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their airf devices, an' the lads that went to study wi' them wad hae done mair an' better sittin' in a peat-bog, like their forbears of the persecution, wi' a Bible under their oxter an' a speerit o' prayer in their heart. There was nae doubt onyway but that Mr. Soulis had been ower lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o' books wi' him—mair than had ever been seen before in a' that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi' them, for they were a' like to have smoored in the De'il's

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Hag between this and Kilmackerlie. They were books o' divinity, to be sure, or so they ca'd them; but the serious were o' opinion there was little service for sae mony, when the hail o' God's Word would gang in the neuk o' a plaid. Then he wad sit half the day and half the nicht forbye, which was scant decent—writin', nae less; an' first they were feared he wad read his sermons; an' syne it proved he was writin' a book himsel', which was surely no' fittin' for ane o' his years an' sma' experience.

Onyway it behoved him to get an auld, decent wife to keep the manse for him a' see to his bit denners; an' he was recommended to an auld limmer—Janet M'Clour, they ca'd her—an' sae far left to himsel' as to be ower persuaded. There was mony advised him to the contrar, for Janet was mair than suspeckit by the best folk in Ba'weary. Lang or that, she had had a wean to a dragoon; she hadna come forrit¹ for maybe thretty year; and bairns had seen her mumblin' to hersel' up on Key's Loan in the gloamin', whilk was an unco time an' place for a God-fearin' woman. Howsoever, it was the laird himsel' that had first tauld the minister o' Janet; an' in thae days he wad hae gane a far gate to plesure the laird. When folk tauld him that Janet was sib to the de'il, it was a' superstition by his way o' it; an' when they cast up the Bible to him an' the witch of Endor, he wad threep it doun their thrapples that thir days were a' gane by, an' the de'il was mercifully restrained.

Weel, when it got about the clachan that Janet M'Clour was to be servant at the manse, the folk were fair mad wi' her an' him thegither; an' some

¹ "To come forrit"—to offer oneself as a communicant.

o' the guidwives had nae better to dae than get round her door-cheeks and chairge her wi' a' that was ken't again' her, frae the sodger's bairn to John Tamson's twa kye. She was nae great speaker; folk usually let her gang her ain gate, an' she let them gang theirs, wi' neither Fair-guid-een nor Fair-guid-day; but when she buckled to, she had a tongue to deave the miller. Up she got, an' there wasna an auld story in Ba'weary but she gart somebody lowp for it that day; they couldna say ae thing but she could say twa to it; till, at the hinder end, the guidwives up an' claught haud of her, an' clawed the coats aff her back, and pu'd her doun the clachan to the water o' Dule, to see if she were a witch or no, soom or droun. The carline skirled till ye could hear her at the Hangin' Shaw, an' she focht like ten; there was mony a guidwife bure the mark o' her neist day an' mony a lang day after; an' just in the hettest o' the collieshangie, wha suld come up (for his sins) but the new minister!

"Women," said he (an' he had a grand voice), "I charge you in the Lord's name to let her go."

Janet ran to him—she was fair wud wi' terror—an' clang to him, an' prayed him, for Christ's sake, save her frae the cummers; an' they, for their pairt, tauld him a' that was ken't, an' maybe mair.

"Woman," says he to Janet, "is this true?"

"As the Lord sees me," says she, "as the Lord made me, no' a word o't. Forbye the bairn," says she, "I've been a decent woman a' my days."

"Will you," says Mr. Soulis, "in the name of God, and before me, His unworthy minister, renounce the devil and his works?"

Weel, it wad appear that when he askit that, she

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gave a girn that fairly frichit them that saw her, an' they could hear her teeth play dirl thegither in her chafts; but there was naething for it but the ae way or the ither; an' Janet lifted up her hand an' renounced the de'il before them a'.

"And now," says Mr. Soulis to the guidwives, "home with ye, one and all, and pray to God for His forgiveness."

An' he gied Janet his arm, though she had little on her but a sark, and took her up the clachan to her ain door like a ledly o' the land; an' her screighin' an' laughing as was a scandal to be heard.

There were mony grave folk lang ower their prayers that nicht; but when the morn cam' there was sic a fear fell upon a' Ba'weary that the bairns hid theirsels, an' even the men-folk stood an' keekit frae their doors. For there was Janet comin' doun the clachan—her or her likeness, nane could tell—wi' her neck thrawn, an' her heid on ae side, like a body that has been hangit, an' a girn on her face like an unstreakit corp. By an' by they got used wi' it, an' even speered at her to ken what was wrang; but frae that day forth she couldna speak like a Christian woman, but slavered an' played click wi' her teeth like a pair o' shears; an' frae that day forth the name o' God cam' never on her lips. Whiles she wad try to say it, but it michtna be. Them that kenned best said least; but they never gied that Thing the name o' Janet M'Clour; for the auld Janet, by their way o't, was in muckle hell that day. But the minister was neither to haund nor to bind; he preached about naething but the folk's cfuelty that had gi'en her a stroke of the palsy; he skelpit the bairns that meddled

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her; an' he had her up to the manse that same nicht, an' dwwalled there a' his lane, wi' her under the Hangin' Shaw.

Weel, time gaed by: and the idler sort commenced to think mair lichtly o' that black business. The minister was weel thocht o'; he was aye late at the writing, folk wad see his can'le doon by the Dule water after twal' at e'en; and he seemed pleased wi' himsel' an' upsitten as at first, though a' body could see that he was dwining. As for Janet she cam' an' she gaed; if she didna speak muckle afore, it was reason she should speak less then; she meddled nae-body; but she was an eldritch thing to see, an' nane wad hae mistrysted wi' her for Ba'weary glebe.

About the end o' July there cam' a spell o' weather, the like o't never was in that country-side; it was lown an' het an' heartless; the herds couldna win up the Black Hill, the bairns were ower weariet to play; an' yet it was gousty too, wi' claps o' het wund that rumm'led in the glens, and bits o' shouers that slockened naething. We aye thocht it büt to thun'er on the morn; but the morn cam', an' the morn's morning, an' it was aye the same uncanny weather, sair on folks and bestial. O' a' that were the waur, nane suffered like Mr. Soulis; he could neither sleep nor eat, he tauld his elders; an' when he wasna writin' at his weary book, he wad be stravaguin' ower a' the country-side like a man possessed, when a' body else was blithe to keep caller ben the house.

Abune Hangin' Shaw, in the bield o' the Black Hill, there 's a bit enclosed grund wi' an iron yett; an' it seems, in the auld days, that was the kirkyaird

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o' Ba'weary, an' consecrated by the Papists before the blessed licht shone upon the kingdom. It was a great howff, o' Mr. Soulis's onyway; there he wad sit an' consider his sermons; an' indeed it's bieldy bit. Weel, as he cam' ower the wast end o' the Black Hill, ae day, he saw first twa, an' syne fower, an' syne seeven corbie craws fleein' round an' round abune the auld kirkyaird. They flew laigh an' heavy, an' squawked to ither as they gaed; an' it was clear to Mr. Soulis that something had put them frae their ordinar. He wasna easy fleyed, an' gaed straucht up to the wa's; an' what suld he find there but a man, or the appearance o' a man, sittin' in the inside upon a grave. He was of a great stature, an' black as hell, and his e'en were singular to see.¹ Mr. Soulis had heard tell o' black men, mony's the time; but there was something unco about this black man that daunted him. Het as he was, he took a kind o' cauld grue in the marrow o' his banes; but up he spak for a' that; an' says he: "My friend, are you a stranger in this place?" The black man answered never a word; he got upon his feet, an' begoud on to hirsle to the wa' on the far side; but he aye lookit at the minister; an' the minister stood an' lookit back; till a' in a meenit the black man was ower the wa' an' rinnin' for the bield o' the trees. Mr. Soulis, he hardly kenned why, ran after him; but he was fair forjeskit wi' his walk an' the het, unhalosome weather; an' rin as he likit, he got nae mair than a glisk o' the black man amang the birks, till he won down to

¹ It was a common belief in Scotland that the devil appeared as a black man. This appears in several witch trials and I think in Law's *Memorials*, that delightful storehouse of the quaint and grisly.

the foot o' the hillside, an' there he saw him ance mair, gaun, hap-step-an'-lawp, ower Dule water to the manse.

Mr. Soulis wasna weel pleased that this fearsome gangrel suld mak' sae free wi' Ba'weary manse; an' he ran the harder, an', wet shoon, ower the burn, an' up the walk; but the de'il a black man was there to see. He stepped out upon the road, but there was naebody there; he gaed a' ower the gairden, but na, nae black man. At the hinder end, an' a bit feared as was but natural, he lifted the hasp an' into the manse; and there was Janet M'Clour before his e'en, wi' her thrawn craig, an' nane sae pleased to see him. An' he aye minded sinsyne, when first he set his e'en upon her, he had the same cauld and deidly grue.

"Janet," says he, "have you seen a black man?"

"A black man!" quo' she. "Save us a'! Ye 're no wise, minister. There 's nae black man in a Ba'weary."

But she didna speak plain, ye maun understand; but yam-yammered, like a powney wi' the bit in its moo.

"Well," says he, "Janet, if there was nae black man, I have spoken with the Accuser of the Brethren."

An' he sat doun like ane wi' a fever, an' his tecth chittered in his heid.

"Hoots," says she, "think shame to yoursel', minister"; an' gied him a drap brandy that she kept aye by her.

Syne Mr. Soulis gaed into his study amang a' his books. It 's a lang, mirk chalmer, perishin' cauld in winter, an' no' very dry even in the top o' the simmer,

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for the manse stands near the burn. Sae doun he sat, and thocht of a' that had come an' gane since he was in Ba'weary, an' his hame, an' the days when he was a bairn an' ran daffin' on the braes; an' that black man aye ran in his heid like the owercome of a sang. Aye the mair he thocht, the mair he thocht o' the black man. He tried the prayer, an' the words wouldna come to him; an' he tried, they say, to write at his book, but he couldna mak' nar mair o' that. There was whiles he thocht the black man was at his oxter, an' the swat stood upon him cauld as well-water; and there was ither whiles, when he cam' to himsel' like a christened bairn an' minded naething.

The upshot was that he gaed to the window an' stood glowrin' at Dule water. The trees are unco thick, an' the water lies deep an' black under the manse; an' there was Janet washin' the cla'es wi' her coats kilted. She had her back to the minister, an' he, for his pairt, hardly kenned what he was lookin' at. Syne she turned round, an' shawed her face; Mr. Soulis had the same cauld grue as twice that day afore, an' it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was deid lang syne, an' this was a bogle in her clay-cauld flesh. He drew back a pickle and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin' in the cla'es croonin' to hersel'; and eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o' woman that could tell the words o' her sang; an' whiles she lookit side-lang doun, but there was naething there for her to look at. There gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes; an' that was Heeven's advertisement. But Mr. Soulis just blamed himsel', he said, to think

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sae ill o' a puir, auld afflicted wife that hadna a freend forbye himsel'; an' he put up a bit prayer for him an' her, an' drank a little caller water—for his heart rose again' the meat—an' gaed up to his naked bed in the gloamin'.

That was a nicht that has never been forgotten in Ba'weary, the nicht o' the seeventeenth o' August, seeventeen hun'er' an' twal'. It had been het afore, as I hae said, but that nicht it was hetter than ever. The sun gaed doun amang unco-lookin' clouds; it fell as mirk as the pit; no' a star, no' a breath o' wund; ye couldna see your han' afore your face, an' even the auld folk cuist the covers frae their beds an' lay pechin' for their breath. Wi' a' that he had upon his mind, it was gey an' unlikely Mr. Soulis wad get muckle sleep. He lay an' he tummled; the gude, caller bed that he got into brunt his very banes; whiles he slept, an' whiles he waukened; whiles he heard the time o' nicht, an' whiles a tyke yowlin' up the muir, as if somebody was deid; whiles he thocht he heard bogles claverin' in his lug, an' whiles he saw spunkies in the room. He behoved, he judged, to be sick; an' sick he was—little he jaloosed the sickness.

At the hinder end, he got a clearness in his mind, sat up in his sark on the bed-side, an' fell thinkin' ance mair o' the black man an' Janet. He couldna weel tell how—maybe it was the cauld to his feet—but it cam' in upon him wi' a spate that there was some connection between thir twa, an' that either or baith o' them were bogles. An' just at that moment, in Janet's room, which was neist to his, there cam' a stramp o' feet as if men were wars'lin', an' then a

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loud bang; an' then a wund gaed reishling round the fower quarters o' the house; an' then a' was ance mair as seelent as the grave.

Mr. Soulis was feared for neither man nor de'il. He got his tinder-box, an' lit a can'le, an' made three steps o't ower to Janet's door. It was on the hasp, an' he pushed it open, an' keeked bauldly in. It was a big room, as big as the minister's ain, an' plenished wi' grand, auld solid gear, for he had naething else. There was a fower-posted bed wi' auld tapestry; an' a braw cabinet o' aik, that was fu' o' the minister's divinity books, an' put there to be out o' the gate; an' a wheen duds o' Janet's lying here an' there about the floor. But nae Janet could Mr. Soulis see; nor ony sign o' a contention. In he gaed (an' there 's few that wad hae followed him) an' lookit a' round, an' listened. But there was naething to be heard, neither inside the manse nor in a' Ba'weary parish, an' nae-thing to be seen but the muckle shadows turnin' round the can'le. An' then, a' at aince, the minister's heart played dunt an' stood stock-still; an' a cauld wund blew amang the hairs o' his heid. Whaten a weary sicht was that for the puir man's e'en! For there was Janet hangin' frae a nail beside the suld aik cabinet; her heid aye lay on her shouther, her e'en were steekit, the tongue projected frae her mouth, an' her heels were twa feet clear abune the floor.

"God forgive us all!" thocht Mr. Soulis, "poor Janet's dead."

He cam' a step nearer to the corp; an' then his heart fair whammled in his inside. For by what can-trip it wad ill beseem a man to judge, she was hangin'

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frae a single nail an' by a single wursted thread for darnin' hose.

It 's a awfu' thing to be your lane at nicht wi' siccan prodigies o' darkness; but Mr. Soulis was strong in the Lord. He turned an' gaed his ways oot o' that room, an' lockit the door ahint him; an' step by step, doun the stairs, as heavy as leed; and set doun the can'le on the table at the stairfoot. He couldna pray, he couldna think, he was dreepin' wi' caul' swat, an' naething could he hear but the dunt-dunt-duntin' o' his ain heart. He micht maybe hae stood there an hour, or maybe twa, he minded sae little; when a' o' a sudden, he heard a laigh, uncanny steer up-stairs; a foot gaed to an' fro in the chalmer whaur the corp was hangin'; syne the door was opened, though he minded weel that he had lockit it; an' syne there was a step upon the landin', an' it seemed to him as if the corp was lookin' ower the rail and doun upon him whaur he stood.

He took up the can'le again (for he couldna want the licht), an' as saftly as ever he could, gaed straucht out o' the manse an' to the far end o' the causeway. It was aye pit-mirk; the flame o' the can'le, when he set it on the grund, brunt steedy and clear as in a room; naething moved, but the Dule water seepin' and sabbin' doun the glen, an' yon unhaly footstep that cam' ploddin' doun the stairs inside the manse. He kenned the foot ower weel, for it was Janet's; an' at ilka step that cam' a wee thing nearer, the cauld got deeper in his vitals. He commended his soul to Him that made an' keepit him; "and, O Lord," said he, "give me strength this night to war against the powers of evil."

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By this time the foot was comin' through the passage for the door; he could hear a hand skirt along the wa', as if the fearsome thing was feelin' for its way. The saughs tossed an' maned thegither, a long sigh cam' ower the hills, the flame o' the can'le was blawn about; an' there stood the corp of Thrawn Janet, wi' her grogram gown an' her black mutch, wi' the heid aye upon the shouter, an' the girn still upon the face o't—leevin', ye wad hae said—deid, as Mr. Soulis weel kenned—upon the threshold o' the manse.

It's a strange thing that the soul of man should be that thirled into his perishable body; but the minister saw that, an' his heart didna break.

She didna stand there lang; she began to move again an' cam' slowly towards Mr. Soulis whaur he stood under the saughs. A' the life o' his body, a' the strength o' his speerit, were glowerin' frae his e'en. It seemed she was gaun to speak, but wanted words, an' made a sign wi' the left hand. There cam' a clap o' wund, like a cat's fuff; oot gaed the can'le, the saughs skreighed like folk; an' Mr. Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o't.

"Witch, beldame, devil!" he cried, "I charge you, by the power of God, begone—if you be dead, to the grave—if you be damned, to hell."

An' at that moment the Lord's ain hand out o' the Heevens struck the Horror whaur it stood; the auld, deid, desecrated corp o' the witch-wife, sae lang keepit frae the grave and hirsled round by de'ils, lowed up like a brunstane spunk an' fell in ashes to the grund; the thunder followed, peal on dirlin' peal, the rairin' rain upon the back o' that; and Mr. Soulis

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lowped through the garden hedge, an' ran, wi' skel-loch upon skelloch, for the clachan.

That same mornin', John Christie saw the Black Man pass the Muckle Cairn as it was chappin' six; before eicht, he gaed by the change-house at Knock-dow; an' no' lang after, Sandy M'Lellan saw him gaun linkin' down the braes frae Kilmackerlie. There 's little doubt but it was him that dwalled sae lang in Janet's body; but he was awa' at last; an' sinsyne the de'il has never fashed us in Ba'weary.

But it was a sair dispensation for the minister; lang, lang he lay ravin' in his bed; an' frae that hour to this, he was the man ye ken the day.

BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



THE TALE OF TOD LAPRAIK

MY FAITHER, Tam Dale, peace to his banes, was a wild, sploring lad in his young days, wi' little wisdom and less grace. He was fond of a lass and fond of a glass, and fond of a ran-dan; but I could never hear tell that he was muckle use for honest employment. Frae ae thing to anither, he listed at last for a sodger and was in the garrison of this fort, which was the first way that ony of the Dales cam to set foot upon the Bass. Sorrow upon that service! The governor brewed his ain ale; it seems it was the warst conceivable. The rock was proveesioned frae the shore with vivers, the thing was ill-guided, and there were whiles when they but to fish and shoot solans for their diet. To crown a', thir was the Days of the Persecution. The perishin' cauld chalmers were all occupeed wi' sants and martyrs, the saut of the yearth, of which it wasnae worthy. And though Tam Dale carried a firelock there, a single sodger, and liked a lass and a glass, as I was sayin', the mind of the man was mair just than set with his position. He had glints of the glory of the kirk; there were whiles when his dander rase to see the Lord's sants misguided, and shame covered him that he should

be haulding a can'le (or carrying a firelock) in so black a business. There were nights o' it when he was here on sentry, the place a' wheesht, the frosts o' winter maybe riving in the wa's, and he would hear ane o' the prisoners strike up a psalm, and the rest join in, and the blessed sounds rising from the different chalmers—or dungeons, I would raither say—so that this auld craig in the sea was like a pairt of Heev'n. Black shame was on his saul; his sins hove up before him muckle as the Bass, and above a', that chief sin, that he should have a hand in haggling and hashing at Christ's Kirk. But the truth is that he resisted the spirit. Day cam, there were the rousing companions, and his guid resolves depairtit.

In thir days, dwalled upon the Bass a man of God, Peden the Prophet was his name. Ye'll have heard tell of Prophet Peden. There was never the wale of him sinsyne, and it's a question wi' mony if there ever was his like afore. He was wild's a peat-hag, fearsome to look at, fearsome to hear, his face like the day of judgment. The voice of him was like a solan's and dinnle'd in folks' lugs, and the words of him like coals of fire.

Now there was a lass on the rock, and I think she had little to do, for it was nae place far dacent weemen; but it seems she was bonny, and her and Tam Dale were very well agreed. It befell that Peden was in the gairden his lane at the praying when Tam and the lass cam by; and what should the lassie do but mock with laughter at the sant's devotions? He rose and lookit at the twa o' them, and Tam's knees knoit-ered thegither at the look of him. But whan he spak, it was mair in sorrow than in anger. "Poor thing,

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poor thing!" says he, and it was the lass he lookit at, "I hear you skirl and laugh," he says, "but the Lord has a deid shot prepared for you, and at that surprising judgment ye shall skirl but the ae time!" Shortly thereafter she was daundering on the craigs wi' twa-three sodgers, and it was a blawy day. There cam a gwest of wind, claught her by the coats, and awa' wi' her bag and baggage. And it was remarked by the sodgers that she gied but the ae skirl.

Nae doubt this judgment had some weicht upon Tam Dale; but it passed again and him none the better. Ae day he was flyting wi' anither sodger-lad. "Deil hae me!" quo' Tam, for he was a profane swearer. And there was Peden glowering at him, gash an' waefu'; Peden wi' his lang chafts an' luntin' een, the maud happed about his kist, and the hand of him held out wi' the black nails upon the finger-nebs—for he had nae care of the body. "Fy, fy, poor man!" cries he, "the poor fool man! *Deil hae me*, quo' he; an' I see the deil at his oxter." The conviction of guilt and grace cam in on Tam like the deep sea; he flang down the pike that was in his hands—"I will nae mair lift arms against the cause o' Christ!" says he, and was as gude's word. There was a sair fyke in the beginning, but the governor, seeing him resolved, gied him his dischairge, and he went and dwallt and merried in North Berwick, and had aye a gude name with honest folk frae that day on.

It was in the year seeventeen hunner and sax that the Bass cam in the hands o' the Da'rymples, and there was twa men soucht the chairge of it. Baith were weel qualified, for they had baith been sodgers in the garrison, and kent the gate to handle solans,

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and the seasons and values of them. Forby that they were baith—or they baith seemed—earnest professors and men of comely conversation. The first of them was just Tam Dale, my faither. The second was ane Lapraik, whom the folk ca'd Tod Lapraik maistly, but whether for his name or his nature I could never hear tell. Weel, Tam gaed to see Lapraik upon this business, and took me, that was a toddlin' laddie, by the hand. Tod has his dwallin' in the lang loan benorth the kirkyaird. It's a dark uncanny loan, forby that the kirk has aye had an ill name since the days o' James the Saxt and the deevil's cantrips played therein when the Queen was on the seas; and as for Tod's house, it was in the mirkest end, and was little liked by some that kenned the best. The door was on the sneck that day, and me and my faither gaed straucht in. Tod was a wabster to his trade; his loom stood in the but. There he sat, a muckle fat, white hash of a man like creish, wi' a kind of a holy smile that gart me scunner. The hand of him aye cawed the shuttle, but his een was steeked. We cried to him by his name, we skirled in the deid lug of him, we shook him by the shou'ther. Nae mainner o' service! There he sat on his dowp, an' cawed the shuttle and smiled like creish.

"God be guid to us," says Tam Dale, "this is no canny!"

He had jimp said the word, when Tod Lapraik cam to himsel'.

"Is this you, Tam?" says he. "Haith, man! I'm blythe to see ye. I whiles fa' into a bit dwam like this," he says; "it's frae the stomach."

Weel, they began to crack about the Bass and

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which of them twa was to get the warding o't, and by little and little cam to very ill words, and twined in anger. I mind weel, that as my faither and me gaed hame again, he cam ower and ower the same expression, how little he likit Tod Lapraik and his dwams.

"Dwam!" says he. "I think folk hae brunt far dwams like yon."

Aweel, my faither got the Bass and Tod had to go wantin'. It was remembered sinsyne what way he had ta'en the thing. "Tam," says he, "ye hae gotten the better o' me aince mair, and I hope," says he, "ye'll find at least a' that ye expeckit at the Bass." Which have since been thought remarkable expressions. At last the time came for Tam Dale to take young solans. This was a business he was weel used wi', he had been a craigsman frae a laddie, and trustit nane but himsel'. So there was he hingin' by a line an' speldering on the craig face, whaur it's hieest and steighest. Fower tenty lads were on the tap, hauldin' the line and mindin' for his signals. But whaur Tam hung there was naething but the craig, and the sea belaw, and the solans*skirling and flying. It was a braw spring morn, and Tam whustled as he claught in the young geese. Mony's the time I heard him tell of this experience, and aye the swat ran upon the man.

It chanced, ye see, that Tam keeked up, and he was awaur of a muckle solan, and the solan pyking at the line. He thocht this by-ordinar and outside the creature's habits. He minded that ropes was unco saft things, and the solan's neb and the Bass Rock unco hard, and that twa hunner feet were raither mair than he would care to fa'.

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"Shool!" says Tam. "Awa', bird! Shoo, awa' wi' ye!" says he.

The solan keekit doun into Tam's face, and there was something unco in the creature's ee. Just the ae keek it gied, and back to the rope. But now it wroucht and warstl't like a thing dementit. There never was the solan made that wroucht as that solan wroucht; and it seemed to understand it's employ brawly, birzing the saft rope between the neb of it and a crunkled jag o' stane.

There gaed a cauld stend o' fear into Tam's heart. "This thing is nae bird," thinks he. His een turnt backward in his heid and the day gaed black about him. "If I get a dwam here," he thought, "it's by wi' Tam Dale." And he signalled for the lads to pu' him up.

And it seemed the solan understood about signals. For nae sooner was the signal made than he let be the rope, spried his wings, squawked out loud, took a turn flying, and dashed straucht at Tam Dale's een. Tam had a knife, he gart the cauld steel glitter. And it seemed the solan understood about knives, for nae suner did the steel glint in the sun than he gied the ae squawk, but laigher, like a body disappointit, and flegged aff about the roundness of the craig, and Tam saw him nae mair. And as sune as that thing was gane, Tam's heid drapt upon his shouther, and they pu'd him up like a deid corp, dadding on the craig.

A dram of brandy (which he went never without) brought him to his mind, or what was left of it. Up he sat.

"Rin, Geordie, rin to the boat, mak' sure of the

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boat, man—rin!” he cries, “or yon solan ’ll have it awa’,” says he.

The fower lads stared at ither, an’ tried to whilly-wha him to be quiet. But naething would satisfy Tam Dale, till ane o’ them had startit on aheid to stand sentry on the boat. The ithers askit if he was for down again.

“Na,” says he, “and niether you nor me,” says he, “and as sune as I can win to stand on my twa feet we’ll be aff frae this craig o’ Sawtan.”

Sure eneuch, nae time was lost, and that was ower muckle; for before they won to North Berwick Tam was in a crying fever. He lay a’ the simmer; and wha was sae kind as come speiring for him, but Tod Lapraik! Folk thocht afterwards that ilka time Tod cam near the house the fever had worsened. I kenna for that; but what I ken the best, that was the end of it.

It was about this time o’ the year; my grandfather was out at the white fishing; and like a bairn, I but to gang wi’ him. We had a grand take, I mind, and the way that the fish lay brought us near in by the Bass, whauer we forgaithered wi’ anither boat that belonged to a man Sandie Fletcher in Castleton. He’s no lang deid neither, or yer could speir at himsel’. Weel, Sandie hailed.

“What’s yon on the Bass?” says he.

“On the Bass?” says grandfather.

“Ay,” says Sandie, “on the green side o’t.”

“Whatten kind of a thing?” says grandfather. “There cannae be naething on the Bass but just the sheep.”

“It looks unco like a body.” quo’ Sandie, who was nearer in.

"A body!" says we, and we nane of us likit that. For there was nae boat that could have brought a man, and the key o' the prison yett hung ower my faither's heid at hame in the press bed.

We kept the twa boats closs for company, and crap in nearer hand. Grandfaither had a gless, for he had been a sailor, and the captain of a smack, and had lost her on the sands of Tay. And when we took the gless to it, sure eneuch there was a man. He was in a crunkle o' green brae, a wee below the chaipel, a 'by his lee lane, and lowped and flang and danced like a daft quean at a waddin'.

"It's Tod," says grandfaither, and passed the gless to Sandie.

"Ay, it's him," says Sandie.

"Or ane in the likeness o' him," says grandfaither.

"Sma' is the differ," quo' Sandie. "De'il or warlock, I'll try the gun at him," quo' he, and brought up a fowling-piece that he aye carried, for Sandie was a notable famous shot in all that country.

"Haud your hand, Sandie," says grandfaither; "we maun see clearer first," says he, "or this may be a dear day's wark to the baith of us."

"Hout!" says Sandie, "this is the Lord's judgments surely, and be damned to it!" says he.

"Maybe ay, and maybe no," says my grandfaither, worthy man! "But have you a mind of the Procurator Fiscal, that I think ye'll have forgaithered wi' before," says he.

This was ower true, and Sandie was a wee thing set ajee. "Aweel, Edie," says he, "and what would be your way of it?"

"Ou, just this," says grandfaither. "Let me that

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has the fastest boat gang back to North Berwick, and let you bide here and keep an eye on Thon. If I cannae find Lapraik, I'll join ye and the twa of us'll have a crack wi' him. But if Lapraik's at hame, I'll rin up the flag at the harbour, and ye can try Thon Thing wi' the gun."

Aweel, so it was agreed between them twa. I was just a bairn, an' clum in Sandie's boat, whaur I thought I would see the best of the employ. My grandsire gied Sandie a siller tester to pit in his gun wi' the leid draps, bein' mair deidly again bogles. And then the ae boat set aff for North Berwick, an' the tither lay whaur it was and watched the wan-chancy thing on the brae-side.

A' the time we lay there it lowped and flang and capered and span like a teetotum, and whiles we could hear it skelloch as it span. I hae seen lassies, the daft queans, that would lowp and dance a winter's nicht, and still be lowping and dancing when the winter's day cam in. But there would be folk there to hauld them company, and the lads to egg them on; and this thing was its lee-lane. And there would be a fiddler diddling his elbock in the chimney-side; and this thing had nae music but the skirling of the solans. And the lassies were bits o' young things wi' the reid life dinnling and standing in their members; and this was a muckle, fat, crieshy man, and him fa'n in the vale o' years. Say what ye like, I maun say what I believe. It was joy was in the creature's heart; the joy o' hell, I daursay: joy whatever. Mony a time I have askit mysel', why witches and warlocks should sell their sauls (whilk are their maist dear possessions) and be auld, duddy, wrunkl't wives or auld, feckless,

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doddered men; and then I mind upon Tod Lapraik dancing a' they hours by his lane in the black glory of his heart. Nae doubt they burn for it in muckle hell, but they have a grand time here of it, whatever! —and the Lord forgie us!

Weel, at the hinder end, we saw the wee flag yirk up to the mast-head upon the harbour rocks. That was a' Sandie waited for. He up wi' the gun, took a deleeberate aim, an' pu'd the trigger. There cam' a bang and then ae waefu' skirl frae the Bass. And there were we rubbin' our een and lookin' at ither like daft folk. For wi' the bang and the skirl the thing had clean disappeared. The sun glintit, the wund blew, and there was the bare yaird whaur the Wonder had been lowping and flinging but ae second syne.

The hale way hame I roared and grat wi' the terror of that dispensation. The grawn folk were nane sae muckle better; there was little said in Sandie's boat but just the name of God; and when we won in by the pier, the harbour rocks were fair black wi' the folk waitin' us. It seems they had fund Lapraik in ane of his dwams, cawing the shuttle and smiling. Ae lad they sent to hoist the flag, and the rest abode there in the wabster's house. You may be sure they liked it little; but it was a means of grace to severals that stood there praying in to themsel's (for nane cared to pray out loud) and looking on thon awesome thing as it cawed the shuttle. Syne, upon a suddenty, and wi' the ae dreidfu' skelloch, Tod sprang up frae his hinderlands and fell forrit on the wab, a bluidy corp.

When the corp was examined the leid draps had-

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nae played buff upon the warlock's body; sorrow a leid drap was to be fund; but there was grandfaither's siller tester in the puddock's heart of him.

Andie had scarce done when there befell a mighty silly affair that had its consequence. Neil, as I have said, was himself a great narrator. I have heard since that he knew all the stories in the Highlands; and thought much of himself, and was thought much of by others, on the strength of it. Now Andie's tale reminded him of one he had already heard.

"She would ken that story afore," he said. "She was the story of Uistean More M'Gillie Phadrig and the Gavar Vore."

"It is no sic a thing," cried Andie. "It is the story of my faither (now wi' God) and Tod Lapraik. And the same in your beard," says he; "and keep the tongue of ye inside your Hielant chafts!"

In dealing with Highlanders it will be found, and has been shown in history, how well it goes with Lowland gentlefolk; but the thing appears scarce feasible for Lowland commons. I had already remarked that Andie was continually on the point of quarrelling with our three MacGregors, and now, sure enough, it was to come.

"Thir will be no words to use to shentlemans," says Neil.

"Shentlemans!" cries Andie. "Shentlemans, ye hielant stot! If God would give ye the grace to see yoursel' the way that ithers see ye, ye would throw your denner up."

There came some kind of a Gaelic oath from Neil, and the black knife was in his hand that moment.

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There was no time to think; and I caught the Highlander by the leg, and had him down, and his armed hand pinned out, before I knew what I was doing. His comrades sprang to rescue him, Andie and I were without weapons, the Gregara three to two. It seemed we were beyond salvation, when Neil screamed in his own tongue, ordering the others back, and made his submission to myself in a manner the most abject, even giving me up his knife which (upon a repetition of his promises) I returned to him on the morrow.

Two things I saw plain: the first, that I must not build too high on Andie, who had shrunk against the wall and stood there, as pale as death, till the affair was over; the second, the strength of my own position with the Highlanders, who must have received extraordinary charges to be tender of my safety. But if I thought Andie came not very well out in courage, I had no fault to find with him upon the account of gratitude. It was not so much that he troubled me with thanks, as that his whole mind and manner appeared changed; and as he preserved ever after a great timidity of our companions, he and I were yet more constantly together.

BY
S. R. CROCKETT



THE TUTOR OF CURLYWEE

THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION started to walk across the great moors of the Kells Range so early in the morning that for the first time for twenty years he saw the sun rise. Strong, stalwart, unkemp, John Bradfield, Right Honourable and Minister of the Queen, strode over the Galloway heather in his rough homespun. "Ursa Major" they called him in the House. His colleagues, festive like schoolboys before the Old Man with the portfolios came in, subscribed to purchase him a brush and comb for his hair, for the jest of the Cabinet Minister is even as the jest of the schoolboy. John Bradfield was sturdy in whatever way you might take him. Only last session he had engineered a great measure of popular education through the House of Commons in the face of the antagonism, bitter and unscrupulous, of Her Majesty's Opposition, and the Gallio lukewarmness of his own party. So now there was a ripple of great contentment in the way he shook back locks which at forty-five were as raven black as they had been at twenty-five, and the wind that blew gently over the great billowy expanse of rock and

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heather smoothed out some of the crafty crow's feet deepening about his eyes.

When he started on a thirty-mile walk over the moors, along the dark purple precipitous slopes above Loch Trool, the glory of summer was melting into the more Scottish splendours of a fast coming autumn, for the frost had held off long, and then in one night had bitten snell and keen. The birches wept sunshine, and the rowan trees burned red fire.

The Minister of Education loved the great spaces of the Southern uplands, at once wider and eerier than those of the Highlands. There they lie waiting for their laureate. No one has sung of them nor written in authentic rhyme the strange weird names which the mountain tops bandy about among each other, appellations hardly pronounceable to the southron. John Bradfield, however, had enough experience of the dialect of the "Tykes" of Yorkshire to master the intricacies of the nomenclature of the Galloway uplands. He even understood and could pronounce the famous quatrain—

The Slock, Milquharker, and Craignine,
The Breeshie and Craignaw;
The five best hills for corklit,
That e'er the Star wife saw.¹

The Minister of Education hummed this rhyme, which he had learned the night before from his host in the hall tower which stands by the gate of the

¹ In old times the rocks and cliffs of the Dungeon of Buchan were famous for a kind of moss known as "corklit," used for dyeing, the gathering of which formed part of the livelihood of the peasantry. At one time it was much used for dyeing soldiers' red coats.

—*Harper's Rambles in Galloway.*

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Ferrytown of Cree. As he made his way with long swinging gait over the heather, travelling by compass and the shrewd head which the Creator had given him, he was aware about midday of a shepherd's hut which lay in his track. He went briskly up to the door, passing the little pocket-handkerchief of kail-yaird which the shepherd had carved out of the ambient heather. The purple bells grew right up to the wall of grey stone dyke which had been built to keep out the deer, or mayhap occasionally to keep them in, when the land was locked with snow, and venison was toothsome.

"Good day to you, mistress," said the Minister of Education, who prided himself on speaking to every woman in her own tongue.

"And good day to you, sir," heartily returned the sonsy, rosy-cheeked goodwife, who came to the door, "an' blithe I am to see ye. It's no that aften that I see a body at the Back Hoose o' Curlywee."

John Bradfield soon found himself well entertained—farles of cake, crisp and toothsome, milk from the cow, with golden butter in a lordly dish, cheese from a little round kebbuck, which the mistress of the Back House of Curlywee kept covered up with a napkin to keep it moist.

The goodwife looked her guest all over.

"Ye'll not be an Ayrshire man nae, I'm thinkin'. Ye kind o' favour them in the features, but ye hae the tongue o' the English."

"My name is John Bradfield, and I come from Yorkshire," was the reply.

"An' my name's Mistress Glencairn, an' my man Tammas is herd on Curlywee. But he's awa' ower by

the Wolf's Slock the day lookin' for some for-wandered yowes."

The Minister of Education, satisfied with the good cheer, bethought himself of the curly heads that he had seen about the door. There was a merry face, brown with the sun, brimful of mischief, looking round the corner of the lintel at that moment. Suddenly the head fell forward and the body tumultuously followed, evidently by some sudden push from behind. The small youth recovered himself and vanished through the door, before his mother had time to do more than say, "My certes, gin I catch you loons——," as she made a dart with the handle of the besom at the culprit.

For a little John Bradfield was left alone. There were sounds of a brisk castigation outside, as though some one were taking vigorous exercise on tightly stretched corduroy. "And on the mere the wailing died away!"

"They're good lads eneuch," said the mistress, entering a little breathless, and with the flush of honest endeavour in her eye, "but when their faither's oot on the hill they get a wee wild. But as ye see, I try to bring them up in the way that they should go," she added, setting the broomstick in the corner.

"What a pity," said the Minister of Education, "that such bright little fellows should grow up in this lonely spot without an education."

He was thinking aloud more than speaking to his hostess. The herd's wife of Curlywee looked him over with a kind of pity mingled with contempt.

"Edicated! Did ye say? My certes, but my bairns are as weel edicated as onybody's bairns. Juist e'en

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try them, gin it be your wull, sir, an' ye'll fin' them no that far ahint yer ain!"

Going to the door she raised her voice to the telephonic pitch of the Swiss *jodel* and the Australian "coo-ee."

"Jee-mie, Aä-leck, Aä-nie, come ye a' here this meenit!"

The long Galloway vowels lingered on the still air, even after Mistress Glencairn came her ways into the house. There was a minute of a great silence outside. Then a scuffle of naked feet, the sough of subdued whispering, a chuckle of interior laughter, and a prolonged scuffling just outside the window.

"Gin ye dinna come ben the hoose an' be douce, you Jeemie, an' Rob, an' Alick, I'll come till ye wi' a stick! Mind ye, your faither 'ill no be lang frae hame the day."

A file of youngsters entered, hanging their heads, and treading on each other's bare toes to escape being seated next to the formidable visitor.

"Wull it please ye, sir, to try the bairns' learning for yoursel'?"

A Bible was produced, and the three boys and their sister read round in a clear and definite manner, lengthening the vowels it is true, but giving them their proper sound, and clanging their consonants like hammers ringing on anvils.

"Very good!" said John Bradfield, who knew good reading when he heard it.

From reading they went on to spelling, and the great Bible names were tried in vain. The Minister of Education was glad that he was examiner, and not a member of the class. Hebrew polysyllables and

Greek proper names fell thick and fast to the accurate aim of the boys, to whom this was child's play. History followed, geography, even grammar, maps were exhibited, and the rising astonishment of the Minister of Education kept pace with the quiet complacent pride of the Herd's Wife of Curlywee. The examination found its climax in the recitation of the "Shorter Catechism." Here John Bradfield was out of his depth, a fact instantly detected by the row of sharp examinees. He stumbled over the reading of the questions; he followed the breathless enunciation of that expert in the "Caratches," Jamie, with a gasp of astonishment. Jamie was able to say the whole of *Effectual Calling* in six ticks of the clock, the result sounding to the uninitiated like the prolonged birr of intricate clockwork rapidly running down.

"What is the chief end of man?" slowly queried the Minister of Education, with his eye on the book.

"Mans-chiefend-glorfy God-joyim-f'rever!" returned Jamie nonchalantly, all in one word, as though someone had asked him what was his name.

The Minister of Education threw down his Catechism.

"That is enough. They have all done well, and better than well. Allow me," he said, doubtfully turning to his hostess, "to give them each a trifle——"

"Na, na," said Mistress Glencairn, "let them e'en do their work withoot needin' carrots hadden afore their nose like a cuddy. What wad they do wi' siller?"

"Well, you will at least permit me to send them each a book by post—I suppose that you get letters up here occasionally?"

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"Deed, there's no that muckle correspondence amang us, but when we're ower at the kirk, there yin o' the herds on Lamachan that gangs doon by to see a lass that leeves juist three miles frae the post office, an' she whiles fetches ocht that there may be for us, an' he gi'es it us at the kirk."

John Bradfield remembered his letters and telegrams even now entering in a steady stream into his London office and overflowing his ministerial tables, waiting his return—a solemnizing thought. He resolved to build a house on the Back Hill of Curlywee, and have his letters brought by way of the kirk and the Lamachan herd's lass that lived three miles from the post office.

"Oot wi' ye!" said the mistress briefly, addressing her offspring, and the school scaled with a tumultuous rush, which left a sense of vacancy and silence and empty space about the kitchen.

"And now will you tell me how your children are so well taught?" said John Bradfield. "How far are you from a school?"

"Weel, we're sixteen mile frae Newton Stewart, where there's a schule•but no road, an' eleven frae the Clatterin'Shaws, where there's a road but no schule."

"How do you manage then?" The Minister was anxious to have the mystery solved.

"WE KEEP A TUTOR!" said the herd's wife of Curlywee, as calmly as though she had been a duchess.

The clock ticked in its shiny mahogany case, like a hammer on an anvil, so still it was. The cat yawned and erected its back. John Bradfield's astonishment kept him silent.

"Keep a tutor," he muttered; "this beats all I have ever heard about the anxiety of the Scotch peasantry to have their children educated. We have nothing like this even in Yorkshire."

Then to his hostess he turned and put another question.

"And, if I am not too bold, how much might your husband get in the year?"

"Tammas Glencairn is a guid man, though he's my man, an' he gets a good wage. He's weel worthy o't. He gets three an' twenty pound in the year, half score o' yowes, a coo's grass, a bow o' meal, a bow o' pitatas, an' as mony peats as he likes to cast, an' win', an' cairt."

"But how," said John Bradfield, forgetting his manners in his astonishment, "in the name of fortune does he manage to get a tutor?"

"He disna keep him. *I* keep him!" said Mistress Glencairn with great dignity.

The Minister of Education looked his genuine astonishment this time. Had he come upon an heiress in her own right?

His hostess was mollified by his humbled look.

"Ye see, sir, it's this way," she said, seating herself opposite to him on a clean-scoured, white wooden chair, "there's mair hooses in this neighborhood than ye wad think. There's the farm hoose o' the Black Craig o' Dee, there's the herd's hoose o' Garrary, the onstead o' Neldricken, the Dungeon o' Buchan—an' a wheen mair that, gin I telled ye the names o', ye wadna be a bit the wiser. Weel, in the simmer time, whan the colleges gang doon, we get yin o' the college lads to come to this quarter. There's

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some o' them fell fond to come. An' they pit up for three or fower weeks here, an' for three or four weeks at the Garrary ower by, an' the bairns travels ower to whaur the student lad is bidin', an' gets their learnin'. Then when it's time for the laddie to be gaun his ways back to college, we send him awa' weel buskit wi' muirland claith, an' weel providit wi' butter an' eggs, oatmeal an' cheese for the comfort o' the wame o' him. Forbye we gather up among oorsels an' bid him guid speed wi' a maitter o' maybe ten or twal' poun' in his pooch. *An' that's the way we keep a tutor!"*

BY

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM



BEATTOCK FOR MOFFAT

THE BUSTLE on the Euston platform stopped for an instant to let the men who carried him to the third-class compartment pass along the train. Gaunt and emaciated, he looked just at death's door, and, as they propped him in the carriage between two pillows, he faintly said, "Jock, do ye think I'll live as far as Moffat? I should na' like to die in London in the smoke."

His cockney wife, drying her tears with a cheap hem-stitched pocket-handkerchief, her scanty tenn-bred hair looking like wisps of tow beneath her hat, bought from some window in which each individual article was marked at seven-and-sixpence, could only sob. His brother, with the country sun and wind burn still upon his face, and his huge hands hanging like hams in front of him, made answer.

"Andra'," he said, "gin ye last as far as Beattock, we'll gie ye a braw hurl back to the farm, syne the bask air, ye ken, and the milk, and, and—but can ye last as far as Beattock, Andra'?"

The sick man, sitting with the cold sweat upon his face, his shrunk limbs looking like sticks inside his ill-made black slop suit, after considering the

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proposition on its merits, looked up, and said, "I should na' like to bet I feel fair boss, God knows; but there, the mischief of it is, he will na' tell ye, so that, as ye may say, his knowlidge has na' commercial value. I ken I look as gash as Garscadden. Ye mind, Jock, in the braw auld times, when the auld laird just slipped awa', whiles they were birlin' at the clairet. A braw death, Jock . . . do ye think it'll be rainin' about Ecclefechan? Aye . . . sure to be rainin' about Lockerbie. Nae Christians there, Jock, a' Johnstones and Jardines, ye mind?"

The wife, who had been occupied with an air cushion, and, having lost the bellows, had been blowing into it till her cheeks seemed almost bursting, and her false teeth were loosened in her head, left off her toil to ask her husband "If 'e could pick a bit of something, a pork pie, or a nice sausage roll, or something tasty," which she could fetch from the refreshment room. The invalid having declined to eat, and his brother having drawn from his pocket a dirty bag, in which were peppermints, gave him a "drop," telling him that he "minded he aye used to like them weel, when the meenister had fairly got into his prelection in the auld kirk, outby."

The train slid almost imperceptibly away, the passengers upon the platform looking after it with that half-foolish, half-astonished look with which men watch a disappearing train. Then a few sandwich papers rose with the dust almost to the level of the platform, sank again, the clock struck twelve, and the station fell into a half quiescence, like a volcano in the interval between the lava showers. Inside the third-class carriage all was quiet until the lights of

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Harrow shone upon the left, when the sick man, turning himself with difficulty, said, "Good-bye, Harrow-on-the-Hill. I aye liked Harrow for the hill's sake, tho' ye can scarcely ca' yon wee bit mound a hill, Jean."

His wife who, even in her grief, still smarted under the Scotch variant of her name, which all her life she had pronounced as "Jayne", and who, true Cockney as she was, bounded her world within the lines of Plaistow, Peckham Rye, the Welsh 'Arp ('Endon way), and Willesden, moved uncomfortably at the depreciation of the chief mountain in her cosmos, but held her peace. Loving her husband in a sort of half-antagonistic fashion, born of the difference of type between the hard, unyielding, yet humorous and sentimental Lowland Scot, and the conglomerate of all races of the island which meet in London, and produce the weedy, shallow breed, almost incapable of reproduction, and yet high strung and nervous, there had arisen between them that intangible rail of misconception which, though not excluding love, is yet impervious to respect. Each saw the other's failings, or, perhaps, thought the good qualities which each possessed were faults, for usually men judge each other by their good points, which, seen through prejudice of race, religion, and surroundings, appear to them defects.

The brother, who but a week ago had left his farm unwillingly, just when the "neeps were wantin' heughin' and a feck o' things requirin' to be done, forby a puckle sheep waitin' for keelin'," to come and see his brother for the last time, sat in that dour and seeming apathetic attitude which falls upon the

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country man, torn from his daily toil, and plunged into a town. Most things in London, during the brief intervals he had passed away from the sick bed, seemed foolish to him, and of a nature such as a self-respecting Moffat man, in the hebdomadal enjoyment of the "prelections" of a Free Church minister, could not authorize.

"Man, saw ye e'er a carter sittin' on his cart, and drivin' at a trot, instead o' walkin' in a proper manner alongside his horse?" had been his first remark.

The short-tailed sheep dogs, and the way they worked, the inferior quality of the cart horses, their shoes with hardly any calkins worth the name, all was repugnant to him.

On Sabbath, too, he had received a shock, for, after walking miles to sit under the "brither of the U.P. minister at Symington," he had found Erastian hymn books in the pews and noticed with stern reprobation that the congregation stood to sing, and ~~that~~ instead of sitting solidly whilst the "man wrastled in prayer," stooped forward in the fashion called the Nonconformist lounge.

His troubled spirit had received refreshment from the sermon, which, though short, and extending to but some five-and-forty minutes, had still been powerful, for he said:

"When yon wee, shilpit meenister—brither, ye ken, of rantin' Ferguson, out by Symington—shook the congregation ower the pit mouth, ye could hae fancied that the very sowls in hell just girmed. Man, he garred the very stour to flee aboot the kirk, and, hadna' the big book been weel brass banded, he would hae dang the haricles fair oot."

So the train slipped past Watford, swaying round the curves like a gigantic serpent, and jolting at the facing points as a horse "pecks" in his gallop at an obstruction in the ground.

The moon shone brightly into the compartment, extinguishing the flickering of the half-candle-power electric light. Rugby, the station all lit up, and with its platforms occupied but by a few belated passengers, all muffled up like race horses taking their exercise, flashed past. They slipped through Cannock Chase, which stretches down with heath and firs, clear brawling streams, and birch trees, an outpost of the north lost in the midland clay. They crossed the oily Trent, flowing through alder copses, and with its backwaters all overgrown with lilies, like an "agua-pey" in Paraguay or in Brazil.

The sick man, wrapped in cheap rugs, and sitting like Guy Fawkes, in the half comic, half pathetic way that sick folk sit, making them sport for fools, and, at the same time, moistening the eye of the judicious, who reflect that they themselves may one day sit as they do, bereft of all the dignity of strength, looked listlessly at nothing as the train sped on. His loving, tactless wife, whose cheap "sized" handkerchief had long since become a rag with mopping up her tears, endeavoured to bring round her husband's thoughts to paradise, which she conceived a sort of music hall, where angels sat with their wings folded, listening to sentimental songs.

Her brother-in-law, reared on the fiery faith of Moffat Calvinism, eyed her with great disfavour, as a terrier eyes a rat imprisoned in a cage.

"Jean wumman," he burst out, "to hear ye talk, I

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would jist think your meenister had been a perfectly illeeterate man, pairadise here, pairadise there; what do ye think a man like Andra' could dae daunderin' about a gairden naked, pu'in' soor aipples frae the trees?"

Cockney and Scotch conceit, impervious alike to outside criticism, and each so bolstered in its pride as to be quite incapable of seeing that anything existed outside the purlieus of their sight, would soon have made the carriage into a battle-field, had not the husband, with the authority of approaching death, put in his word.

"Whist, Jeanie wumman. Jock, dae ye no ken that the Odium-Theologicum is just a curse—pairadise—set ye baith up—pairadise. I dinna' even richtly ken if I can last as far as Beattock."

Stafford, its iron furnaces belching out flames, which burned red holes into the night, seemed to approach, rather than be approached, so smoothly ran the train. The mingled moonlight and the glare of iron-works lit the canal beside the railway, and from the water rose white vapours as from Styx or Periphlegethon. Through Cheshire ran the train, its timbered houses showing ghastly in the frost which coated all the carriage windows, and rendered them opaque. Preston, the catholic city, lay silent in the night, its river babbling through the public park, and then the hills of Lancashire loomed lofty in the night. Past Garstang, with its water-lily-covered ponds, Garstang where, in the days gone by, catholic squires, against their will, were forced on Sundays to "take wine" in church on pain of fine, the puffing serpent slid.

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The talk inside the carriage had given place to sleep, that is, the brother-in-law and wife slept fitfully, but the sick man looked out, counting the miles to Moffat, and speculating on his strength. Big drops of sweat stood on his forehead, and his breath came double, whistling through his lungs.

They passed by Lancaster, skirting the sea on which the moon shone bright, setting the fishing boats in silver as they lay scarcely moving on the waves. Then, so to speak, the train set its face up against Shap Fell, and, puffing heavily, drew up into the hills, the scattered grey stone houses of the north, flanked by their gnarled and twisted ash trees, hanging upon the edge of the streams, as lonely, and as cut off from the world (except the passing train) as they had been in Central Africa. The moorland roads, winding amongst the heather, showed that the feet of generations had marked them out, and not the line, spade, and theodolite, with all the circumstance of modern road makers. They, too, looked white and unearthly in the moonlight, and now and then a sheep, aroused by the snorting of the train, moved from the heather into the middle of the road, and stood there motionless, its shadow filling the narrow track, and flickering on the heather at the edge.

The keen and penetrating air of the hills and night roused the two sleepers, and they began to talk, after the Scottish fashion, of the funeral, before the anticipated corpse.

"Ye ken, we've got a braw new hearse outby, sort of Epescopalian lookin', we' gless a' roond, so's ye can see the kist. Very conceity too, they mak' the

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hearses noo-a-days. I min' when they were jist auld sort o' ruckly boxes, awfu' licht, ye ken upon the springs, and just went dodderin' alang, the body swinging to and fro, as if it would flee richt oot. The roads, ye ken, were no nigh and so richtly metalled in thae days."

The subject of the conversation took it cheerfully, expressing pleasure at the advance of progress as typified in the new hearse, hoping his brother had a decent "stan'o' black," and looking at his death, after the fashion of his kind, as it were something outside himself, a fact indeed, on which, at the same time, he could express himself with confidence as being in some measure interested. His wife, not being Scotch, took quite another view, and seemed to think that the mere mention of the word was impious, or, at the least, of such a nature as to bring on immediate dissolution, holding the English theory that unpleasant things should not be mentioned, and that, by this means, they can be kept at bay. Half from affection, half from the inborn love of cant, inseparable from the true Anglo-Saxon, she endeavoured to persuade her husband that he looked better, and yet would mend, once in his native air.

"At Moffit, ye'd 'ave the benefit of the 'ill breezes, and that 'ere country milk, which never 'as no cream in it, but 'olesome, as you say. Why yuss, in about eight days at Moffit, you'll be as 'earty as you ever was. Yuss, you will, you take my word."

Like a true Londoner, she did not talk religion, being too thin in mind and body even to have grasped the dogma of any of the sects. Her heaven a music 'all, her paradise to see the King drive through the

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streets, her literary pleasure to read lies in newspapers, or pore on novelettes, which showed her the pure elevated lives of duchesses, placing the knaves and prostitutes within the limits of her own class; which view of life she accepted as quite natural, and as a thing ordained to be by the bright stars who write.

Just at the Summit they stopped an instant to let a goods train pass, and, in a faint voice, the consumptive said, "I'd almost lay a wager now I'd last to Moffat, Jock. The Shap, ye ken, I aye looked at as the beginning of the run home. The hills, ye ken, are sort o' heartsome. No that they're bonny hills like Moffat hills, na', na', ill-shapen sort of things, just like Borunty tatties, awfu' puir names, too, Shap Fell and Rowland Edge, Hutton Roof Craggs and Arnside Fell; heard ever onybody sich-like names for hills? Naething to fill the mooth; man, the Scotch hills jist grap ye in the mooth for a' the world like speerits."

They stopped at Penrith, which the old castle walls make even meaner, in the cold morning light, than other stations look. Little Salkeld, and Armathwaite, Cotehill, and Scotby, all rushed past, and the train, slackening, stopped with a jerk upon the platform, at Carlisle. The sleepy porters bawled out "change for Maryport," some drovers slouched into carriages, kicking their dogs before them, and, slamming to the doors, exchanged the time of day with others of their tribe, all carrying ash or hazel sticks, all red faced and keen eyed, their caps all crumpled, and their great-coat tails all creased, as if their wearers had lain down to sleep full dressed, so as to lose

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no time in getting to the labours of the day. The old red sandstone church, with something of a castle in its look, as well befits a shrine close to a frontier where in days gone by the priest had need to watch and pray, frowned on the passing train, and on the manufactories, whose banked up fires sent poisonous fumes into the air, withering the trees which, in the public park, a careful council had hedged round about with wire.

The Eden ran from bank to bank, its water swirling past as wildly as when "the Bauld Buccleugh" and his Moss Troopers, bearing the "Kinmount" fettered in their midst, plunged in and passed it, whilst the keen Lord Scroope stood on the brink amazed and motionless. Gretna, so close to England, and yet a thousand miles away in speech and feeling, found the sands now flying through the glass. All through the mosses which once were the "Debateable Land" on which the moss troopers of the clan Graeme were used to hide the cattle stolen from the "auncient enemy," the now repatriated Scotchman murmured feebly "that it was bonny scenery" although a drearier prospect of "moss hags" and stunted birth trees is not to be found. At Ecclefechan he just raised his head, and faintly spoke of "yon auld carle, Carlyle, ye ken, a dour thrawn body, but a gran' pheelosopher," and then lapsed into silence, broken by frequent struggles to take breath.

His wife and brother sat still, and eyed him as a cow watches a locomotive engine pass, amazed and helpless, and he himself had but the strength to whisper, "Jock, I'm dune, I'll no see Moffat, blast it,

yon smoke, ye ken, yon London smoke has been ower muckle for ma lungs."

The tearful, helpless wife, not able even to pump up the harmful and unnecessary conventional lie, which, after all, consoles only the liar, sat pale and limp, chewing the fingers of her Berlin gloves. Upon the weather-beaten cheek of Jock glistened a tear, which he brushed off as angrily as it had been a wasp.

"Aye, Andra'," he said, "I would hae liket awfu' weel that ye should win to Moffat. Man, the rowan trees are a' in bloom, and there's a bonny breer upon the corn—aye, ou aye, the reid bogs are lookin' gran' the year—but, Andra', I'll tak ye east to the auld kirkyaird, ye'll no' ken onything about it, but we'll hae a heartsome funeral."

Lockerbie seemed to fly towards them, and the dying Andra' smiled as his brother pointed out the place and said, "Ye mind, there are no ony Christians in it," and answered, "Aye, I mind, naething but Jardines," as he fought for breath.

The death dewes gathered on his forehead as the train shot by Nethercleugh, passed Wamphray and Dinwoodie, and with a jerk pulled up at Beattock just at the summit of the pass.

So in the cold spring morning light, the fine rain beating on the platform, as the wife and brother got their almost speechless care out of the carriage, the brother whispered, "Dam't, ye've done it, Andra', here's Beattock; I'll tak' ye east to Moffat yet to dee."

But on the platform, huddled on the bench to which he had been brought, Andra' sat speechless and dying in the rain. The doors banged to, the guard stepped in lightly as the train flew past, and

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a belated porter shouted, "Beattock, Beattock for Moffat," and then, summoning his last strength, Andra' smiled, and whispered faintly in his brother's ear, "Aye, Beattock—for Moffat!" Then his head fell back, and a faint bloody foam oozed from his pallid lips. His wife stood crying helplessly, the rain beating upon the flowers of her cheap hat, rendering it shapeless and ridiculous. But Jock, drawing out a bottle, took a short dram and saying, "Andra', man, ye made a richt gude fecht o' it," snorted an instant in a red pocket-handkerchief, and calling up a boy, said, "Rin, Jamie, to the toon, and tell McNicol to send up and fetch a corp." Then, after helping to remove the body to the waiting-room, walked out into the rain, and, whistling "Corn Rigs" quietly between his teeth, lit up his pipe, and muttered as he smoked, "A richt gude fecht—man, aye, ou aye, a game yin Andra', pur felly. Weel, weel, he'll hae a braw hurl onyway in the new Moffat hearse."

BY
NEIL MUNRO



THE LOST PIBROCH

TO THE make of a piper go seven years of his own learning and seven generations before. If it is in, it will out, as the Gaelic old-word says; if not, let him take to the net or sword. At the end of his seven years one born to it will stand at the start of knowledge, and leaning a fond ear to the drone, he may have parley with old folks of old affairs. Playing the tune of the "Fairy Harp," he can hear his fore-folks, plaided in skins, towsy-headed and terrible, grunting at the oars and snoring in the caves; he has his whittle and club in the "Desperate Battle" (my own tune, my darling!), where the white-haired searovers are on the shore, and a stain's on the edge of the tide; or, trying his art on Laments, he can stand by the cairn of kings, ken the colour of Fingal's hair, and see the moon-glint on the hook of the Druids!

To-day there are but three pipers in the wide world, from the Sound of Sleat to the Wall of France. Who they are, and what their tartan, it is not for one to tell who has no heed for a thousand dirks in his doublet, but they may be known by the lucky ones who hear them. Namely players tickle the chanter and take out but the sound; the three give a tune the charm that I mention—a long thought and a bard's

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thought, and they bring the notes from the deeps of time, and the tale from the heart of the man who made it.

But not of the three best in Albainn to-day is my story, for they have not the Lost Pibroch. It is of the three best, who were not bad, in a place I ken—Half Town that stands in the wood.

You may rove for a thousand years on league-long brogues, or hurry on fairy wings from isle to isle and deep to deep, and find no equal to that same Half Town. It is not the splendour of it, nor the riches of its folk; it is not any great routh of field or sheep-fank, but the scented winds of it, and the comfort of the pine-trees round and about it on every hand. My mother used to be saying (when I had the notion of fairy tales), that once on a time, when the woods were young and thin, there was a road through them, and the pick of children of a country-side wandered among them into this place to play at sheilings. Up grew the trees, fast and tall, and shut the little folks in so that the way out they could not get if they had the mind for it. But never an out they wished for. They grew with the firs and alders, a quiet clan in the heart of the big wood, clear of the world out-by.

But now and then wanderers would come to Half Town, through the gloomy coves, under the tall trees. There were packmen with tales of the out-world. There were broken men flying from rope or hatchet. And once on a day of days came two pipers—Gilian, of Clan Lachlan of Strathlachlan, and Rory Ban, of the Macnaghton; of Dundarave. They had seen Half Town from the sea—smoking to the clear air on the hillside; and through the weary woods they

came, and the dead quiet of them, and they stood on the edge of the fir-belt.

Before them was what might be a township in a dream, and to be seen at the one look, for it stood on the rising hill that goes back on Lochow.

The dogs barked, and out from the houses and in from the fields came the quiet clan to see who could be here. Biggest of all the men, one they named Coll, cried on the strangers to come forward; so out they went from the wood-edge, neither coy nor crouse, but the equal of friend or foe, and they passed the word of day.

"Hunting," they said, "in Easachosain, we found the roe come this way."

"If this way she came, she's at Duglas Water by now, so you may bide and eat. Few, indeed, come calling on us in Half Town; but whoever they are, here's the open door, and the horn spoon, and the stool by the fire."

He took them in and he fed them, nor asked their names nor calling, but when they had eaten well he said to Rory, "You have skill of the pipes; I know by the drum of your fingers on the horn spoon."

"I have tried them," said Rory, with a laugh, "a bit—a bit. My friend here is a player."

"You have the art?" asked Coll.

"Well, not what you might call the whole art," said Gilian, "but I can play—oh yes! I can play two or three ports."

"You can that!" said Rory.

"No better than yourself, Rory."

"Well, maybe not, but—anyway, not all tunes; I allow you do 'Mackay's Banner' in a pretty style."

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"Pipers," said Coll, with a quick eye to a coming quarrel, "I will take you to one of your own trade in this place—Paruig Dall, who is namely for music."

"It's a name that's new to me," said Rory, short and sharp, but up they rose and followed Big Coll.

He took them to a bothy behind the Half Town, a place with turf walls and never a window, where a blind man sat winding pirns for the weaver-folks.

"This," said Coll, showing the strangers in at the door, "is a piper of parts, or I'm no judge, and he has as rare a stand of great pipes as ever my eyes sat on."

"I have that same," said the blind man, with his face to the door. "Your friends, Coll?"

"Two pipers of the neighbourhood," Rory made answer. "It was for no piping we came here, but by the accident of the chase. Still and on, if pipes are here, piping there might be."

"So be it," cried Coll; "but I must go back to my cattle till night comes. Get you to the playing with Paruig Dall, and I'll find you here when I come back." And with that he turned about and went off.

Paruig put down the ale and cake before the two men, and "Welcome you are," said he.

They ate the stranger's bite, and lipped the stranger's cup, and then, "Whistle 'The Macraes' March,' my fair fellow," said the blind man.

"How ken you I'm fair?" asked Rory.

"Your tongue tells that. A fair man has aye a soft bit in his speech, like the lapping of milk in a cogie; and a black one, like your friend there, has the sharp ring of a thin burn in frost running into an iron pot. 'The Macraes' March,' *laochain*."

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Rory put a pucker on his mouth and played a little of the fine tune.

"Sol!" said the blind man, with his head to a side, "you had your lesson. And you, my Strathlachlan boy without beard, do you ken 'Muinntir a' Ghlinne so'?"

"How ken ye I'm Strathlachlan and beardless?" asked Gilian.

"Strathlachlan by the smell of herring-scale from your side of the house (for they told me yesterday the gannets were flying down Strathlachlan way, and that means fishing), and you have no beard I know, but in what way I know I do not know."

Gilian had the *siubhal* of the pibroch but begun when the blind man stopped him.

"You have it," he said, "you have it in a way, the Macarthur's way, and that's not my way. But, no matter, let us to our piping."

The three men sat them down on three stools on the clay floor, and the blind man's pipes passed round between them.

"First," said Paruig (being the man of the house, and to get the vein of his own pipes)—"first I'll put on them 'The Vaunting'." He stood to his shanks, a lean old man and straight, and the big drone came nigh on the black rafters. He filled the bag at a breath and swung a lover's arm round about it. To those who know not the pipes, the feel of the bag in the oxtter is a gaiety lost. The sweet round curve is like a girl's waist; it is friendly and warm in the crook of the elbow and against a man's side, and to press it is to bring laughing or tears.

The bothy roared with the tuning, and then the air came melting and sweet from the chanter. Eight

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steps up, four to the turn, and eight down went Paruig, and the *piobaireachd* rolled to his fingers like a man's rhyming. The two men sat on the stools, with their elbows on their knees, and listened.

He played but the *ur iar*, and the *crunluadh* to save time, and he played them well.

"Good indeed! Splendid, my old fellow!" cried the two; and said Gilian, "You have a way of it in the *crunluadh* not my way, but as good as ever I heard."

"It is the way of Padruig Og," said Rory. "Well I know it! There are tunes and tunes, and 'The Vaunting' is not bad in its way, but give me 'The Macraes' March'."

He jumped to his feet and took the pipes from the old man's hands, and over his shoulder with the drones.

"Stand back, lad!" he cried to Gilian, and Gilian went nearer the door.

The march came fast to the chanter—the old tune, the fine tune that Kintail has heard before, when the wild men in their red tartan came over hill and moor; the tune with the river in it, the fast river and the courageous that kens not stop nor tarry, that runs round rock and over fall with a good humour, yet no mood for anything but the way before it. The tune of the heroes, the tune of the pinelands and the broad straths, the tune that the eagles of Loch Duich crack their beak together when they hear, and the crows of that country-side would as soon listen to as the squeal of their babies.

"Well! mighty well!" said Paruig Dall. "You have the tartan of the clan in it."

"Not bad, I'll allow," said Gilian. "Let me try."

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He put his fingers on the holes, and his heart took a leap back over two generations, and yonder was Glencoe! The grey day crawled on the white hills and the black roofs smoked below. Snow choked the pass, *eas* and corri filled with drift and flatted to the brae-face; the wind tossed quirky and cruel in the little bushes and among the smooing lintels and joists; the blood of old and young lapped on the hearthstone, and the bairn, with a knifed throat, had an icy lip on a frozen teat. Out of the place went the tramped path of the Campbell butchers—far on their way to Glenlyon and the towns of paper and ink and liars—“Muintir a’ ghlinne so, muintir a’ ghlinne so!—People, people, people of this glen, this glen, this glen!”

“Dogs! dogs! O God of grace—dogs and cowards!” cried Rory. “I could be dirking a Diarmaid or two if by luck they were near me.”

“It is piping that is to be here,” said Paruig, “and it is not piping for an hour nor piping for an evening, but the piping of Dunvegan that stops for sleep nor supper.”

So the three stayed in the bothy and played tune about while time went by the door. The birds flew home to the branches, the long-necked beasts flapped off to the shore to spear their flat fish; the rutting deers bellowed with loud throats in the deeps of the wood that stands round Half Town, and the scents of the moist night came gusty round the door. Over the back of Auchnabreac the sun trailed his plaid of red and yellow, and the loch stretched salt and dark from Cairn Dubh to Creaggans.

In from the hill the men and the women came,

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weary-legged, and the bairns nodded at their heels. Sleepiness was on the land, but the pipers, piping in the bothy, kept the world awake.

"We will go to bed in good time," said the folks, eating their suppers at their doors; "in good time when this tune is ended." But tune came on tune, and every tune better than its neighbour, and they waited.

A cruisie-light was set alowe in the blind man's bothy, and the three men played old tunes and new tunes—salute and lament and brisk dances and marches that coax tired brogues on the long roads.

"Here's 'Tulloch Ard' for you, and tell me who made it," said Rory.

"Who kens that? Here's 'Raasay's Lament,' the best port Padruig Mor ever put together."

"Tunes and tunes. I'm for 'A Kiss o' the King's Hand'."

Thug mi pòg 'us pòg,
Thug mi pòg do làmh an rìgh,
Cha do chuir gaoth an craicionn caorach,
Fear a fhuair an fhaoilt ach mi!

Then a quietness came on Half Town, for the piping stopped, and the people at their doors heard but their blood thumping and the night-hags in the dark of the fir-wood.

"A little longer and maybe there will be more," they said to each other, and they waited; but no more music came from the drones, so they went in to bed.

There was quiet over Half Town, for the three pipers talked about the Lost Tune.

"A man my father knew," said Gilian, "heard a bit of it once in Moideart. A terrible fine tune he said it was, but sore on the mind."

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"It would be the tripling," said the Macnaghton, stroking a reed with a fond hand.

"Maybe. Tripling is ill enough, but what is tripling? There is more in piping than brisk fingers. Am I not right, Paruig?"

"Right, oh! right. The Lost *Piobaireachd* asks for skilfully tripling, but Macruimen himself could not get at the core of it for all his art."

"You have heard it then!" cried Gilian.

The blind man stood up and filled out his breast.

"Heard it!" he said; "I heard it, and I play it—on the *feadan*, but not on the full set. To play the tune I mention on the full set is what I have not done since I came to Half Town."

"I have ten round pieces in my sporran, and a bonnet-brooch it would take much to part me from; but they're there for the man who'll play me the Lost *Piobaireachd*," said Gilian, with the words tripping each other to the tip of his tongue.

"And here's a Macnaghton's fortune on the top of the round pieces," cried Rory, emptying his purse on the table.

The old man's face got hot and angry. "I am not," he said, "a tinker's minstrel, to give my tuning for bawbees and a quaich of ale. The king himself could not buy the tune I ken if he had but a whim for it. But when pipers ask it they can have it, and it's yours without a fee. Still if you think to learn the tune by my piping once, poor's the delusion. It is not a port to be picked up like a cockle on the sand, for it takes the schooling of years and blindness forbye."

"Blindness?"

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"Blindness indeed. The thought of it is only for the dark eye."

"If we could hear it on the full set!"

"Come out, then, on the grass, and you'll hear it, if Half Town should sleep no sleep this night."

They went out of the bothy to the wet short grass. Ragged mists shook o'er Cowal, and on Ben Ime sat a horned moon like a galley of Lorn.

"I heard this tune from the Moideart man—the last in Albainn who knew it then, and he's in the clods," said the blind fellow.

He had the mouthpiece at his lip, and his hand was coaxing the bag, when a bairn's cry came from a house in the Half Town—a suckling's whimper, that, heard in the night, sets a man's mind busy on the sorrows that folks are born to. The drones clattered together on the piper's elbow and he stayed.

"I have a notion," he said to the two men. "I did not tell you that the Lost *Piobaireachd* is the *piob-àireachd* of good-byes. It is the tune of broken clans, that sets the men on the foray and makes cold hearth-stones. It was played in Glenshira when Gilleasbuig Gruamach could stretch stout swordsmen from Boshang to Ben Bhuidhe, and where are the folks of Glenshira this day? I saw a cheery night in Carnus that's over Lochow, and song and story busy about the fire, and the Moideart man played it for a wager. In the morning the weans were without fathers, and Carnus men were scattered about the wide world."

"It must be the magic tune, sure enough," said Gilian.

"Magic indeed, *laochain!* It is the tune that puts men on the open road, that makes restless lads and

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seeking women. Here's a Half Town of dreamers and men fattening for want of men's work. They forget the world is wide and round about their fir trees, and I can make them crave for something they cannot name."

"Good or bad, out with it," said Rory, "if you know it at all."

"Maybe no', maybe no'. I am old and done. Perhaps I have lost the right skill of the tune, for it's long since I put it on the great pipe. There's in me the strong notion to try it whatever may come of it, and here's for it."

He put his pipe up again, filled the bag at a breath, brought the booming to the drones, and then the chanter-reed cried sharp and high.

"He's on it," said Rory in Gilian's ear.

The groundwork of the tune was a drumming on the deep notes where the sorrows lie—"Come, come, come, my children, rain on the brae and the wind blowing."

"It is a salute," said Rory.

"It's the strange tune anyway," said Gilian; "listen to the time of yon!"

The tune searched through Half Town and into the gloomy pine-wood; it put an end to the whoop of the night-hag and rang to Ben Bhreac. Boatmen deep and far on the loch could hear it, and Half Town folks sat up to listen.

Its story was the story that's ill to tell—something of the heart's longing and the curious chances of life. It bound up all the tales of all the clans, and made one tale of the Gaels' past. Dirk nor sword against the tartan, but the tartan against all else, and the Gaels'

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target fending the hill-land and the juicy straths from the pock-pitted little black men. The winters and the summers passing fast and furious, day and night roaring in the ears, and then again the clans at variance, and warders on every pass and on every parish.

Then the tune changed.

"Folks," said the reeds, coaxing. "Wide's the world and merry the road. Here's but the old story and the women we kissed before. Come, come to the flat-lands rich and full, where the wonderful new things happen and the women's lips are still to try!"

"To-morrow," said Gilian in his friend's ear—"to-morrow I will go jaunting to the North. It has been in my mind since Beltane."

"One might be doing worse," said Rory, "and I have the notion to try a trip with my cousin to the foreign wars."

The blind piper put up his shoulder higher and rolled the air into the *crunluadh breabach* that comes prancing with variations. Pride stiffened him from heel to hip, and hip to head, and set his sinews like steel.

He was telling of the gold to get for the searching and the bucks that may be had for the hunting. "What," said the reeds, "are your poor crops, slashed by the constant rain and rotting, all for a scart in the bottom of a pot? What are your stots and heifers—black, dun, and yellow—to milch-cows and horses? Here's but the same for ever—toil and sleep, sleep and toil even on, no feud nor foray nor castles to harry—only the starved field and the sleeping moss.

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Let us to a brisker place! Over yonder are the long straths and the deep rivers and townships strewn thick as your corn-rigs; over yonder's the place of the packmen's tales and the packmen's wares: steep we the withies and go!"

The two men stood with heads full of bravery and dreaming—men in a carouse. "This," said they, "is the notion we had, but had no words for. It's a poor trade piping and eating and making amusement when one might be wandering up and down the world. We must be packing the haversacks."

Then the *crunluadh mach* came fast and furious on the chanter, and Half Town shook with it. It buzzed in the ear like the flowers in the Honey Croft, and made commotion among the birds rocking on their eggs in the wood.

"*Sol sol!*" barked the *iolair* on Craig-an-eas. "I have heard it before it was an ill thing to be satisfied; in the morning I'll try the kids on Maam-side, for the hares are wersh and tough." "Hearken, dear," said the *londubh*. "I know now why my beak is gold; it is because I once ate richer berries than the whortle, and in season I'll look for them on the braes of Glenfinne." "Honk-unk," said the fox, the cunning red fellow, "am not I the fool to be staying on this little brae when I know so many roads elsewhere?"

And the people sitting up in their beds in Half Town moaned for something new. "Paruig Dall is putting the strange tune on her there," said they. "What the meaning of it is we must ask in the morning, but, *ochanoch!* it leaves one hungry at the heart." And then gusty winds came snell from the north, and where the dark crept first, the day made his first

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showing, so that Ben Ime rose black against a grey sky.

"That's the Lost *Piobaireachd*," said Paruig Dall when the bag sunk on his arm.

And the two men looked at him in a daze.

Sometimes in the spring of the year the winds from Lorn have it their own way with the Highlands. They will come tearing furious over the hundred hills, spurred the faster by the prongs of Cruahan and Dunchuach, and the large woods of home toss before them like corn before the hook. Up come the poor roots and over on their broken arms go the tall trees, and in the morning the deer will trot through new lanes cut in the forest.

A wind of that sort came on the full of the day when the two pipers were leaving Half Town.

"Stay till the storm is over," said the kind folks; and "Your bed and board are here for the pipers forty days," said Paruig Dall. But "No" said the two; "we have business that your *piobaireachd* put us in mind of."

"I'm hoping that I did not play yon with too much skill," said the old man.

"Skill or no skill," said Gilian, "the like of yon I never heard. You played a port that makes poor enough all ports ever one listened to, and piping's no more for us wanderers."

"Blessings with thee!" said the folks all, and the two men went down into the black wood among the cracking trees.

Six lads looked after them, and one said, "It is an ill day for a body to take the world for his pillow, but

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what say you to following the pipers?"

"It might," said one, "be the beginning of fortune. I am weary enough of this poor place, with nothing about it but wood and water and tufty grass. If we went now, there might be gold and girls at the other end."

They took crooks and bonnets and went after the two pipers. And when they were gone half a day, six women said to their men, "Where can the lads be?"

"We do not know that," said the men, with hot faces, "but we might be looking." They kissed their children and went, with *cromags* in their hands, and the road they took was the road the King of Errin rides, and that is the road to the end of days.

A weary season fell on Half Town, and the very bairns dwined at the breast for a change of fortune. The women lost their strength, and said, "To-day my back is weak, to-morrow I will put things to right," and they looked slack-mouthed and heedless-eyed at the sun wheeling round the trees. Every week a man or two would go to seek something—a lost heifer or a wounded roe that was never brought back—and a new trade came to the place; the selling of herds. Far away in the low country, where the winds are warm and the poorest have money, black-cattle were wanted, so the men of Half Town made up long droves and took them round Glen Beag and the Rest.

Wherever they went they stayed, or the clans on the roadside put them to steel, for Half Town saw them no more. And a day came when all that was left in that fine place were, but women and children and a blind piper.

"Am I the only man here?" asked Paruig Dall

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when it came to the bit, and they told him he was.

“Then here’s another for fortune!” said he, and he went down through the woods with his pipes in his oxter.

BY
NEIL MUNRO

★
WAR

I

IT WAS the pause of the morning, when time stands, and night and day breathe hard ere they get to grips. A cock with a foggy throat started at the crowing, down at Slochd-a-Chubair. Over from Stron a shrewd thin wind came to make stir among the trees in the Duke's big garden, and the crows rasped their beaks on the beech-branches, for they knew that here was the day's forerunner. Still and on the town slept, stretched full out, dour set on the business. Its quirky lanes and closes were as black as the pit. There was only one light in all the place, and a big town and a bonny it is, house and house with high outside stairs and glass windows, so that the wonder is the King himself does not take thought to stay in it, even if it were only for the comfort of it and the company of the MacCailein Mor. Only one light, and that was splashing, yellow, and mixed with a thick peat-reek, out of Jean Rob's open door, facing the bay, on the left, on the Lowlands road. Now and then Jean would come to the door and stand, a blob of darkness in the yellow light, to see if the day was afoot on Ben Ime, or to throw a look at the front of the town for signs of folk stirring.

WAR

"Not a peep, not a peep! Sleep! sleep! Few of them part with a man to-day with so sore a heart as Jean Rob."

Then back to her Culross girdle, for she was at the baking of bannocks to go in her husband's *dorlach* for the wars.

She had not shut an eye all night. Rob snored at her side slow and heavy while she lay on her back on a bed of white hay, staring up at the black larch joists glinting with the red scad of the peats. She was a Crarae woman, and that same people were given to be throng with the head, and she kept thinking, thinking even on. At last she could bide it no longer, so she up with a leap on the floor to face a new day and all the luck of it.

About the luck being good or ill there might be little doubt. It was the year after they started at the building of the Castle, a laggard spring at the hind-end of a cruel winter, with not a fin in all the seas for the poor fishermen, and black mutton at six Saxon shillings the side. And what the wars were about Jean Rob or her like little knew or cared. Very little, like enough, as is the way with wars, but any way wars there were: the Duke and his House would have it that their people must up and on with belt and target, and away on the weary road like their fathers before them. Some said it was the old game with the Inverlochy dogs (rive them and seize them!); others, that some bastard was at variance with the Duke about the Papist Stewarts—a silly lad called Tearlach with a pack of wild Irishers and duddy Macleans and Macdonalds and Camerons from the Isles and the North at his back.

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"Bundle and Go" it was any way in Campbell country from Cruachan to Cowal, from Cantyre to the march of Keppochan, and that's the fine rolling land of sappy grasses and thick woods. In the heart and midst of it Duke Archie played dirl on the boss of his shield on a cold March day, and before night swords were at the sharpening from shore to shore. That's war for ye—quicker than flame, surer than word of mouth, and poor's the man who says "What for?" to his chief.

Rob Donn, for all that, was vassal to no man; for he was come of the swordsmiths of the glen, and they had paper to show that their rigs were held for no service other than beating out good fighting steel on the anvil. Poor as he was, he could wear one feather in his bonnet if his fancy was on feathers, and no one bragged more of his forefolk. But Elrigmor—a thin old man with little stomach for quarrels—offered twenty pounds English for a man to take his place with the Campbells; and Rob took the money and the loan of Elrigmor's sword, half for the sake of the money and half for the sake of a bit play with Sir Claymore.

Said he to his wife, jingling the Geordies in his hand on the day he got them, "Here's the price of a hero; and troth it's little enough for a good arm-smith's blood!"

"Don't say it, Rob," said Jean.

"Och! I am but laughing at thee, good-wife. Brave dogs would they be that would face the tusks of the Diarmaid boars. Like the wind on the chaff—troosh!—we'll scatter them! In a week I'll be home."

"In a week?"

"To be sure, Jean. I'll buy with the money a stot or two on the road to bring back with me, for there's little lifting in the Duke's corps, more's the pity! My grandfather seldom came back from the wars without a few head of cattle before him."

So the money went in Rob Donn's sporran, and Jean would have bit her tongue out before she would crave for part o't from a man going among strangers and swords.

The bairn had but one word for her father from then till he started, and that was "Cockade." What it was the little one never knew, but that it was something braw and costly, a plaything for a father to go far off for.

"Two or three of them, my white love!" would Rob Donn say, fond and hearty. "They'll be as thick as nuts on the ground when we're done of the gentry that wear them on their bonnets." And he had a soft wet eye for the child, a weakling, white and thin, never quite the better of the snell winds of winter. If cockades, indeed, were to be had for the fighting of a fortnight without sleep, Rob Donn would have them for her.

So now was the morning to put on fighting gear and go on the foray for white cockades.

By-and-by a cruisie-light crept out at the gables of the town, and the darkness filled with the smell of new peat burning. Aora, spluttering past Jean Rob's door with a gulp into the Cooper's Pool, made, within the house, the only sound of the morning.

Jean scraped the meal off her hands and went again to the door to look about and listen.

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"Ay, ay! up at last," she said to herself.

"There's the Major's light, and Kate Mhor up for the making of his breakfast, and a lowe in the weaver's shed. The Provost's is dark—poor man!—it's little his lady is caring!"

She was going to turn about and in, when the squeal of a bagpipe came from the townhead, and the player started to put his drones in order. "Ochan! ochan!" said poor Jean, for here, indeed, was the end of her hopes; there was no putting back from the Duke's errand. She listened a little to the tuning as if it was the finest of *piobaireachds*, and it brought a curious notion to her mind of the first reel she danced with her man to the squeezing of that same sheep-skin. Then the reeds roared into the air of "Baile Inneraora."

"*Och a Dhé! siod e nis! Eirich, eirich, Rob!*" she cried in to the man among the blankets, but there was no need for the summons. The gathering rang, far ben in the chambers of sleep, and Rob was stark awake, with a grasp at his hip for the claymore.

"Troth! I thought it was the camp! and them on us," he laughed foolishly in his beard.

Up and down the street went Dol' Dubh, the Duke's second piper, the same who learned the art of music right well from the Macruimens of Boreraig, and he had as sweet a finger on the chanter as Padruig himself, with the nerve to go round the world. Fine, fine it was for him; be sure, to be the summoner to battle! Lights jumped to the little lozens of the windows and made streaks on the cracks of the doors, and the Major's man came from his loft ganting with a mouth like the glee'd gun, a lantern swinging on a

finger, making for the stable to saddle his master's horse. A garret window went up with a bang, and Peter MacIntyre, wright, put out a towsy head and snuffed the air. It was low tide in the two bays, and the town was smelling less of peat-reek than of seawrack and saltness. One star hung in the north over Dunchuach.

"They have the good day for starting the jaunt, whatever," said the wright. "If I was a stone or two lighter, and had one to look after the shop, it's off on this ploy I would be too." He took in his head, the top nodding briskly on his Kilmarnock bonnet, and wakened the wife to help him on with his clothes.

Aora, Aora, Baile Inneraora,
I got a bidding to Baile Inneraora;
I got the bidding, but little they gave me,
Aora, Aora, Baile Chailein Mhoir!

Dol' Dubh was up at the Cross, swelled out like a net-bow, blasting furiously, his heart athump with the piper's zest. Doors drummed, windows screeched in their cases, women's voices went from land to land, and the laugh and cry of bairns new roused from the hot toss of dreams. Far up the highroad a horse's hoofs were dunting hollow and hearty on the stones, and by-and-by through the Arches trotted the Cornal, his tall body straight and black against the dun of the gables. He had a voice like a rutting deer. "Master Piper," he roared to Dol' Dubh, tugging his beast back on its haunches, "stop that braggart air and give us 'Bundle and Go', and God help the Campbell that's not on the Cadger's Quay before the sun's over Stron Point!"

"Where is the air like it?" said Dol' to himself, slacking a reed with a thumb-nail. "Well they ken it where little they love it with its vaunting!" But he up with his drones on his shoulder and into the tune that had the Cornal's fancy. Beside him the Cornal stood at his horse's stirrup in the grey-brown of the morning, his head still light with the bottle of claret wine his lady in Lecknamban had put before him ere he had boot over saddle.

Then the town stirred to its affairs. The Major's horse went clattering over the cobble-stones to his door-end, the arm-room door opened, and old Nanny Bheag, who kept the key, was lifted off her feet and in, on the rush of young lads making for the new guns Lorne Clerk had up from the Low Country. On the belts of the older men, loth to leave the fire-end, mothers and wives were hanging bags with thick farls of cake, and cheese, and the old Aora salve for sword-cuts. If they had their way of it, these *caille-achan*, the fighting gear would be all kebbucks of cheese and dry hose, and no powder and ball. The men blustered, high-breasted, with big words in their beards, and no name too dirty for the crew they were off to scatter—praising themselves and making the fine prophecies, as their folks did before them with better rights when the town was more in the way of going to wars. Or they roundly scolded the weans for making noise, though their eyes were learning every twist of the copper hair and every trick of the last moment, to think on when long and dreary would be the road before them.

There was a break in Dol' Dubh's music, and high over the big town rang the Cornal's voice, starting the

bairns in their sleep and setting them up and screaming.

"Laggards! laggards! O lazy ones! Out! out! Campbells before were never so swear't to be marching. It is time to be steeping the withies!"

Hard back went the stout doors on the walls, and outran the folk. The brogues skliffed and hammered; men with muskets, swords, dirks, and targes ran down the street, and women and children behind them. A tumult filled the town from side to side and end to end, and the lanes and closes were streaming with the light from gaping doors. Old and young, the boy and the snooded girl, women with bairn at breast, *bodach* and *cailleach*, took to the Cross muster, leaving the houses open to the wind and to the world. The cats thrummed by the fires, and the smell of the sea-wrack came in beside them.

"I have you here at last," said the Cornal, dour and dark, throwing his keen eyes along the row of men. "Little credit are ye to my clan and chief, and here's to the Lowlands low, and would to God I was there now among the true soldados with stomachs for slaughter and the right skill of fence and musketoon! A short tulzie, and a tow at the thrapple of bastard Chevalier would there be in that case. Here's but a wheen herds, weavers, and gillies holding Brown Betty like a kail-runt!"

He was one of the Craignish Campbells, the Cornal—Dugald, brother of Lachan who got death at a place called Fontenoy in the summer before—very sib to the Duke, and it behoved the town-men to say nothing. But they cursed his eyes to each other on the corners of their mouths, and if he knew it he

had sense enough to say nothing.

The women and bairns and the old folks stood in a great crowd behind the Cornal's horse. The Major's mare with him in the sell was dancing an uncanny spring near the Arches, full of freshness and fine feeding as a battle-horse should be, but overly much that way for a man sixteen finger-lengths round the belly and full of fish and ale. From Glen Beag came the slow morning, gusty and stinging; Stob-an-Eas stood black against the grey of it; the tide stretched from shore to shore unfriendly and forlorn.

Jean Rob, with the bairn at her brattie-string, was with the other women seeing her man away, stupid with two sorrows—one because he was going, and the other because he had twenty pounds in his sporran that he might well be doing without; for he was leaving the woman without a groat, and only a boll of meal in the girdel and a wee firkin of salted fish.

The steady breeze came yet from Stron, and sat snug in the sails of the six boats that carried the Duke's men over to Cowal. Brog-an-Turk's skiff put out first, himself at the helm in his tarry jacket; the others, deep down, followed close on her heels. One by one they fell off from the quay. The men waved their bonnets and cried cheerily and vaunting, as was aye the good grace of Clan Diarmaid at the first and the last of forays.

"Blessings with ye!" cried the folk left behind, wet-eyed; and even the Provost's wife took a grief at her inside to see her man with a shaking lip look round the sail of the hin'most boat. Cheering and weeping, singing and *ochain!* there they were on the quay and on the sea, our own folk, our dear folk; and

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who were ever like them when it came to the bit, and stout hearts or kind hearts were wanted?

"Stand back, kindred!" cried the Cornal, putting spurs to his horse, and he pranced up the town-head, a pretty man, to join the Major and gallop round the loch-head to join the corps at Cairn-dubh.

Dol' Dubh stopped his playing at the bow of Brog-an-Turk's skiff when she gulped the first quaich of brine, and the men in all the boats started to sing the old boat-song of "Aora Mo Chridhe tha mi seoladh"—

Aora, my heart, I am sailing, sailing,
Far to the South on the slope of the sea;
Aora *mo chridhe*, it is cold in the far land,
Bitter the stranger with wands on his doorway.
Aora Mochree!

It came back on the wind with a sorrow to break hearts, sinking and swelling as the wind took the fancy, and the long-necked herons stood on the fringe of the tide with their heads high to listen. The sails got scattered and shrunk, and the tune got thin and low, and lost at last in the swish of the waves on the shore, and the ears of those who listened heard the curlew piping cursedly loud over the Cooper's Pool. A grey cold day with rain on the tail of it. High Creag Dubh with its firs and alders and rowans stark and careless over the hollow town. Broad day and brightness, and the cruises and candles burning the ghosts of flame in the empty houses, with doors wide to the empty street and the lanes and closes!

II

The wanderer has ever the best of it, and wae wae

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are the hearts behind! Is it for war or sport, or for the red gold, that a man turns heel on his home and takes the world for his pillow? In his pack is the salve for care as well as for sword-cuts, for ever and always are new things happening. The road crooks through the curious glens; the beasts trot among the grass and fern and into the woods; the girls (the dear ones, the red-lipped ones!) come from the milking of the white-shouldered cattle and look with soft black eyes as he passes, and there is a new tale at the corner of every change-house fire. All that may befall a packman; but better's the lot of the fighter with steel at his haunch, fire at his heart, and every halt a day closer to them he would be seeking.

But the folks behind in the old place! *Mo thru-
aigh! mo thruaigh!* Daybreak, and hot sun, and the creeping in of the night, when the door must be sneaked on the rover; the same place, and still with a want in it, and only guessing at where and how is the loved one out on strange ways on the broad world.

Far up the long Highlands the Campbells were on their way. Loch Sloy and Glen Falloch, Rannoch's bleakness and Ben Alder's steepness, and each morning its own wet grass and misty brae, and each night its dreams on the springy heather.

A woman was weeping on Achadunan because that her man was gone and her chimney stone was cold, and Rob Donn's sporran was emptied at her feet, though he knew not so much as the name of her. But he took a thought and said, "I'll keep the half, for long's the way before us, and ill is travelling among strangers without a roundpiece in the purse." That was but a day's march from Jean Rob, and she

was making a supper of crowdie that was the first meal of the day.

On Spey-side was the camp of the Argylls, and card-play round the fires, with the muskets shining, and the pipes playing sweeter for slumber than for rouse.

"I will put my watch on this turn," said a black Lowlander in the heat of the game.

"Rob Donn's watch is the sun on Tom-an-uardar," said our hero, "but here are ten yellow Geordies," and out went his fortune among the roots of the gall.

"*Troosh! beannachd leat!*" and the coin was a jingle in the other one's pouch.

"I have plenty more where it came from, and cattle enough forbye," said our braggart, and he turned on his elbow whistling "*Crodh Chailein.*"

But let them follow the drum who will, for us the story's beside the hearth. It is not a clatter of steel, and the tulzies of Chevaliers, but the death of an only bairn.

In her house on the Lowlands road Jean Rob starved with the true Highland pride, that sets a face content against the world at kirk or market. Between her and a craving stomach lay but shell-fish and herbs, for she had not a plack to spend, and the little one got all the milk that came from Mally, the dappled one, drying up for calving. Break of day would see the woman, white, thin, keen-eyed, out on the ebb before the fishing-boats were in, splashing in the pools in the sand for partans and clabbie-doods, or with two ready fingers piercing the sand to pull the long spout-fish from his hiding. Or she would put little stakes in the sand, and between them a taut line

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with baited hooks to coax the fish at high tide. But ill was her luck, indeed, for few were the fish that came to the lure to be lifted again at ebb.

Above Kilmalieu on the sea side of Dunchuach, in the tangle and dark of the trees, among the soft splashing soil, the wild leeks gave a scent to the air. These would Jean gather, and the nettle too, and turn them to thin broth; but that same was no fare for a Crarae stomach.

At night when the wee one slept, the mother would have her plaid on her head, and through the town, barefoot, in the darkness, passing the folk at the close-mouths quickly for fear they would speak to her, and her heart would crave for share of the noble supper that made steam from the door of her cousin the rich merchant.

Like a ghost sometimes, wandering about the Cadger's Quay or the gutting-stools, where she would be looking for a dropped giley or a hake from the nets, she would come on a young woman.

"*Dhé!* Jean Rob! is it thyself that is here?"

"Just Jean, my darling, for a little turn, because of the stir in the town, and the smell of the barking nets. Well I like the smell of the bark, and the wind takes little of it up the Lowlands road."

"Thou art not coming out much since the men went to the North. Art well at the house—the little one, now, bless her?"

"Splendid, splendid, *m' eudail*. Faith, it is too fat we will be getting on the fortune Rob got from Elrigmor."

"Indeed, yes, Jean, it was the great luck! When a poor person comes——"

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"Hut tut! Poor nor rich, my people had their own place on Lochowside, and little did my Rob need MacNicol's dirty money; but he was aye fond of a 'horo-yally', and that's the way of his being among them."

"Well, well, if that's the way, our own people were good enough on a time; but a pedigree, thou wilt allow, is a poor plaster for a pain in the stomach. For me, I would have a good shaking of herring and money in the town. It was but black brochan for our one meal to-day, and my mother poorly."

"My dear! *och*, my dear! and I to brag of plenty! Little enough, in truth, is on my own board; but I have a boiling of meal if you come for it in the morning."

"Kindly, kindly, thou good dame. It would be but a loan."

"Yes, indeed, one will be running out of the wherewithal now and again, and 'twas aye 'Mine is yours and yours is mine' in Gaeldom. But I must be stepping."

And while Jean Rob starved, there was never a word from the best and bravest off at the wars, or how they fared, only now and then a half tale from a travelling caird or a Low-Country carrier about gatherings and skirling pipes and hard knocks. His Grace himself kept a horse or two and a good rider on the other side of the Rest, to gallop hot-hoof into the Castle with the first news of how his clan won; but weary was the waiting.

The town took to its old appearance, the aged men clack-clacking with the shuttle, the boys scattering seed over the rig-and-fur of the ploughed fields, the

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women minding their houses. And that, too, is war for ye! The dirk is out, the brogues trail over the hills and through the glens, the clans meet and clash, the full heart belches blood, the grass soaks, the world and the chance of it is put on the luck of a swinging stroke at yon one's neck. War! war! red and lusty—the jar of it fills the land! But oh, *mo chridhe!* home in Glen Shie are women and bairns living their own day's life, and the crack will be blithe in the sheilings to come, for all your quarrels. Where is Hector, and where is Gilean-of-the-Axe, and where is Diarmaid of the boar's snout? They are all gone but for an old song at the sheiling-fire, and life, love, and the Fell Sergeant still come and go in the place the warriors made such stir in!

A stranger would think there was little amiss in the Duke's town. The women sang their long songs of love and yore as they span about the wheel and carded the wool; the bairns guddled in Jumping John's burn, and tore their kilts among the whins, and came home with the crows, red-faced and hungry wamed. At the ale-house there was traffic by day, and heavy drovers and gaugers stamped their feet to the choruses at night. The day lengthened, and comforting winds came from the two bonny black glens; the bracken put on new growths, like the crook of St. Molach that's up-by in the Castle; Easachosain reeled to the piping of birds.

There might be an eye many times a-day on the Stron Point to see if a horseman was rounding it, and the cruises were kept burning a little longer at night in case the news would come in the darkness like the Athol thieves. But patience was ever the gift

of the Gael, and few lost heart.

And at last the news came of Culloden Moor.

It was on a Sunday—a dry clear day—and all the folk were at the church, with old Colin the minister sweating at it for the good of the Ceannloch fishermen in the loft. He was in the middle of his prayer when a noise came over the town, a dunting of hoofs on the causey of the Provost's house-front.

"Amen!" said the cunning Colin, quick as could be, and then, "Friends, here is news for us," and down the pulpit steps he ran briskly like a lad of twenty.

Peter MacIntyre set back the bolt from the door with a bang, and past him the people made rush. The Duke's rider from over the Rest was there in the saddle of a grey garron foaming at the mouth and its hurdies in a tremble.

"Your tidings, your tidings, good man!" cried the people.

The lad sat stark in the saddle, with his eyes wet and his nose pricking with the Gaelic pride.

"I have been at the Castle, and——"

"Your news, just man."

"I have been at the Castle, and MacCailein Mor, who said I rode well from the Rest, said I might come in-by and carry my bud'get to you."

"Out with it, Paruig, little hero. Is't good or ill?"

"What would it be, my heroes, with our own lads, but good? Where's the beat of them? It's 'The Glen is Mine' Dol' Dubh will be playing this day on Culloden, for ours is the battle. They scattered the dirty Northmen and the Irishers like chaff, and Cailein Mor himself gave me a horn of ale from his

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own hands on the head o't."

A roar went up that stirred the crows on Scaurnoch, and there was a Sunday spoiled for you; for the ale went free and merry in the change-house at the Duke's charge till the moon was over Ben Ime.

But there were five houses with the clocks stopped (for the ghosts take no heed of time); five houses with the glasses turned face to the wall (for who dare look in glass to see a wraith at the back of the shoulder?); there were four widows and five mothers wet faced, keening for five fine men who had been, and whose names were now writ on paper on the church door.

III

Day followed day, and still home came no Campbells. They were far to the dreary North, plying sword and fire among the bad clans, harrying for the glory of MacCailein Mor.

And at last on a day the sea-pigs rolled and blew off Stron Point, and the scarts dived like arrows from the sun's eye, deep into a loch boiling with fish. Night found the brown sails bellying out on the scudding smacks, and the snouts of skiff and galley tearing the waves to get among the spoil. Bow-to-back, the nets spotted Finne mile on mile; the kind herrings crowded thick into them; the old luck was back, and the quays in the morning heard the fine tune of the cadger's clinking silver. In a hurry of hurries the fleet came up to the mouth of Shira—Tarbert men, Strathlachlan men, Minard men, black fellows from MacCallum country, and the wine-traffickers from French Foreland to swap sour claret for the sweet fat fish.

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It was ho-ro! and spill the bicker in yon town, for all that the best of its men were away and afar at the killing. The smoke was black from the fires in the Cooper's Pool, the good healthy smell of the gut-pots sought up to the Castle door. Little doubt his Grace (*beannachd leis!*) would come out to the door-step and curse because it made him bock his breakfast, dainty man!

Throng though the town was, round about the little house on the left of the Lowlands Road crept a queer quietness. The cow had dried, and the dull weather kept the spout fish too deep down in the sand for the ready fingers to reach them. So the household of Rob Donn starved to the bone.

"To-morrow—they will be home to-morrow," said Jean to herself every day to keep up her heart; but the days went by, and though it was something to know that Rob was not among the killed at Cul-loden, it was not something to stay the stomach. A stone-throw off were the best and kindest hearts in the world; the woman's cousin, the rich merchant, would give all he had on his board if he knew her trouble, and friends without number would share the last bite with her. But to ask it would be to say she was at the lowest, and to tell that Rob had left her nothing, and she would sooner die in her pride.

Such people as passed her way—and some of them old gossips—would have gone in, but the withie was aye across the door, and that's the sign that business is doing within no one dare disturb. The withie was ever there except at night, when Jean was scouring the countryside for something to eat.

The bairn dwined so fast that even the mother (and

blind indeed's the mother at that bit) saw a little of it. There was no longer the creëpie-stool at the back of the house, in the sun, and the bairn on it, watching the birds; her shanks grew thin like spirtles; her eyes sank far ben in her face, and she would not go the length of the door. She sat at the fireside and laughed her poor cold laugh less every day, till one long thought came to her that kept her busy at the thinking from morning till night with a face like a *cailleach* of eighty.

"White love, white love," Jean would be saying, "your father is on the road with stots and a pouch of cockades."

At that the bairn would come back from her roaming; but soon she was off again into the deeps of mind, her wide eyes like the windows of an empty house for all that could be seen through them.

"Oh! but it will be the fine cockade," poor Jean would press—"what am I saying?—the pack of your father will be full of them. Not the white ones of silk only, but the red and the grassy green, my little calf. You'll be wearing them when you will."

No heeding in the bairn's face.

Then Jean would go out and pull the tansy at the door, and give it to the little one to get the fine scent. The curious shells from the shore, too, would she gather, and lay in rings about the chair, and call her the Queen in her castle. For ever would there be a song at her lips, even if the drops would be in her eyes—old daft songs from fairs and weddings, and fairy rhyming and cheery stories about the Good People up on Sithean Sluaidhe. Her fingers were for ever soft about the bairn, her flesh and blood, strok-

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ing in the hair, softening the cushion, petting her in every hand's-turn. She made a treat to herself by asking her, now and then, something that had to be answered "Yes" or "No," and "Mother" was so sweet in her ears that she would be content to hear no more in all her lifetime.

All the day the bairn crouched up in a hoop-chair with her neck slack and her chin on her breast. Jean was loth to leave her in her bed in the mornings, for she had a notion that to get her out of the blankets and to put her in the clothes of the busy world would be to keep her in the trim for living on.

Still there was no sign of the men returning. Often was Jean's foot at the door and her hand over her eyes to see if there was no stir at Stron or Kilachatrine, and but for good stuff, her heart failed five-score times a-day.

At last, on a day of days, the bairn could not be stirred to notice anything. The tansy fell out of her fingers, and she picked at the wool of the plaid that wrapped her; the shells had no charm for her eye.

Jean made the pack of the coming father as routh as a magic cave. "That father of yours, darling, what a many wonderful things he will bring! I see him on the road. Stots, and cows with milk brimming from the udders, and a pet sheep for his *caileag bheag*; pretty gold and silver things, and brooches and shining stuff. That father of yours! Hurry, father, hurry! Jangling things, and wee fairy-men, and bells to ring for you, *m' eudail*; pretty glasses and dishes to play with, and—O my darling! my darling!"

The bairn's face lost the deep red spots; her little

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mouth slacked and fell; her eyes shut on the sight of the fine things her poor mother made for her out of a rich and willing mind.

Jean lifted her and put her on the bed, and ran with a gutting-knife to where Mally the dappled one lay at the back.

"I must be doing it!" said the woman, and she bled the brute as they do in the poor years in Lorn, and took the cogie of blood into the house to make a pudding of. The last handful of meal in the girdle went into the pot with the warm blood, and she was stirring it with a spoon over the fire when the child clattered at the throat.

Jean turned about with a cry, and at the minute a bagpipe's lilting came over the glassy bay from Stron Point.

It was Clan Campbell back from the wars, the heroes! clouted about the heads and with stains on their red waistcoats that were thicker than wine makes. Dol' Dubh played the old port, sweet and jaunty, at the head of them; the Cornal and the Major snuffed the herrings and said, "Here's our own place, sure enough! See the smoke from our own peats! And the fine cock of the cap on Dun-chuach!"

On the Lowland road the town emptied itself, and the folks ran fast and furious—the boys first, the young women next, and the old folks peching behind. But if the town was up on the warriors soon, the Duke himself was before it. He saw the first of the Company from the Castle, and he was in the saddle for all his threescore, like a boy, and down like the wind to Boshang Gate.

WAR

"Halt!" cried the Cornal to his men, and Dol' Dubh's bag emptied itself with a grunt.

"*Tha sibh an so!* You are here, cousin," said the Duke. "Proud am I to see you and our good lads. They did the old trick well!"

"They did that, MacCailein. The stuff's aye to the fore."

"It's in the blood, man. We have't in us, high or low. I have but one thing to vex me."

"Name it, cousin."

"Well ye ken, Cornal. It's that I had not been with you to see the last crushing Clan Campbell may need to give to an asp's head."

"It was a good ploy missed, I'll not deny."

"What about the Tearlach one? Well plucked, they are telling me?"

"As foolish a lad as ever put tartan on hip, my lord! Frenchy, Frenchy, MacCailein! all outside and no cognizance. Yourself or any of your forebears at the head of his clans could have scoured all Albainn of Geordie's Low-Country red-coats, and yet there were only six thousand true Gaels in all the fellow's corps."

"To read my letters, you would think the whole North was on fire!"

"A bantam's crow, cousin. Clan Campbell itself could have thraved the neck of it at any time up to Dunedin."

"They made a fair stand, did they not?"

"Uch! Poor eno'—indeed it was not what you would call a coward's tulzie either."

"Well, well, that's over, lads! I am proud of my clan and town. *Slochd a Chubair gu bragh!* Stack

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your guns in the arm-room, see your wives and bairns, and come up-by to the Castle for the heroes' bite and sup. Who's that with the white cockade in his bonnet? Is't Rob Donn?"

"It is Rob Donn, cousin, with a bit of the ribbon contrivance for the diversion of his bairn. He tore it from the bonnet of the seventh man he put an end to."

"There's luck in the number, any way, though it was a dear plaything. March!"

Down the road, with their friends hanging about them, and the boys carrying guns and knapsacks, went the men for the town, and Rob Donn left the company as it passed near his own door.

"Faith! 'tis a poor enough home-coming, without wife or bairn to meet one," said he, as he pushed in the door.

"Wife! wife!" he cried ben among the peat-reek, "there's never a stot, but here's the cockade for the little one!"

BY

D. S. MELDRUM



THE TOUCH OF SPRING

THAT MORNING everything at Tarpow held a familiar course. Magnus, the foreman, passing through the kitchen, where Julia Hay, Tarpow's daughter, was bent over the porridge-pot, said:

"The maister's going to market the night?" and she answered him with a smile as fresh as the break of day.

Passing through the kitchen and up the stairs to Tarpow's bedroom, Magnus found Tarpow himself wide awake and grumpy. He reported the weather and took his orders; and when he re-entered the kitchen, the salt was being added to the porridge and the maid had gone to the byre. Although you could not have guessed it from his wife, the foreman had an eye for comeliness,—the plainest wife that ever was could not count against a man's taste,—and Magnus's eyes clung to his young mistress's face, and the dainty hand through which the salt was sifted to the pot. Never before had he seen cause for marvel at her beauty: a new spring and bountifulness seemed to have come upon her. Still stirring the porridge, and swinging round upon her heel, she detained him a minute to advise about Creamy, a

dowie calf, who, she thought, would be better with a bed by the fire here, and her care, and milk from her own hands. Magnus heard enough to send him to the calves' house with a vague sense—he was too dull-witted to have expressed it—that the good things of earth were to be wasted on a silly calf. Tarpow got into his red-brown, weather-spotted garments, and was down in the kitchen as his daughter poured the porridge and the maid came in with the milk-pails; and at an hour when most of us think of awakening, all the hands at Tarpow had done half a day's good work.

An hour before mid-day Tarpow returned to dinner. The meal was laid in the dingy parlour, on the side of the lobby opposite the kitchen. The farmer faced the weather at the head of the table; Julia, at the foot, nearer the door, waited upon him. She had waited upon him all her days.

In the middle of his broth he mumbled into his spoon:

“Broomielaws is coming the nicht.”

Broomielaws came every other market night. It was not Julia's wish to acknowledge, if she detected it, anything unusual in this visit; and she replied:

“Yes, father.”

Tarpow land was thin,—it girmed a' simmer and grat a' winter, as Leddy Pitlyal said of Gutterstone—and Tarpow's farmer had grown old and sour in his fight with it. Yet all around his own, the fields grew fat and heavy crops. “Nature,” said Tarpow—he alluded to her in an unmentionable term—“Nature, the thrawn ——, stood on Tarpow and cuist her favours round it.” Broomielaws especially had

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been blessed in the dispensation. Already, in this forward spring, its fields had flushed a gentle green. You could crop them to the very edges. In sowing and reaping and stacking and threshing, Broomielaws was like a great workshop that never ran on short time. But Tarpow—back-lying Tarpow, with its mean land—worked up outside jobs, as it were, harbouring other men's sheep, as well as its own cattle eating their heads off. Once there had been enough original virtue left in Tarpow's farmer to be a plummet for the shallow thing that owned Broomielaws. Looking from his steading upon his neighbour's fields, Hay felt that in a rightly constituted world poor-spirited Broomielaws should have stood in his shoes. That was years ago. Looking out upon his neighbour's fields now—himself more firmly set in his own shoes—his only thought was to share their bounty in some measure by making Julia their mistress. Worldly and selfish and little sensitive as he was, however, it stuck in his throat to speak more definitely on that matter. At the same time it irritated him, and had been irritating him for months, that this well-grown and capable daughter of his should not meet him half-ways and make explanations easier. Her mother had courted and wedded him ere she was Julia's age: why was the daughter so backward? Perhaps Julia, with her "Yes, father," and no more, was wiser than he thought.

She carried out his plate and her own, the one within the other, and returned with a dish of boiled beef and some potatoes with coarse salt still sticking to their jackets.

"Auld tatties?" he said.

"Yes. The east field."

"Ay. Just so. Braw land to the east'ards—at Broomielaws. Broomielaws is coming the nicht."

"Can ye not put him down at the toll-house?" said Julia, with a heat that was new to her, and caused her father's yellow eyes to sparkle up nastily under his brows.

"Can I eat my meat?" he replied, sharpening his speech on hers.

"Then why don't ye do it? What needs he come bothering us?"

"I've told ye how to keep him from Tarpow at nights," he said. "Draw ben your chair at Broomielaws and he'll leave me at the toll-house quick enough. Fegs! He'll be for driving me from St. Brise market past every public. 'Broomielaws is takin' his wife's father hame sober.' He! he! That's what they'll be saying; and Tarpow'll ha'e to drink his whisky cauld—without his Jooley."

"I thought ye had known my mind on that score," Julia said, breaking in on his laugh.

"I thought ye had known mine," he threw it back. "Upsettin' baggage! Is it that laddie Leslie that has put notions in your head about being aboon marryin' Broomielaws? Where's the speerits? You're very narrow wi' the speerits getting."

"You don't need spirits when you're going to market. Besides, there's none in the house."

"Send Liz to Mrs. Pratt's for some this very day. Would you shame yoursel' and me afore Broomielaws wi' a toom bottle! 'Your head's full o' they mincing ways—ever syne that 'tillery ball. You're owre nice for Broomielaws, and owre guid for your

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ain faither, it would seem."

"Will I tell Aleck to yoke the beast?" said Julia quietly, who generally saved herself in the blast of her father's wrath by bending in it slightly.

"You'll just yoke your tongue, Jooley, till I'm done wi' ye. Woman, ye dinna ken your guid fortune. Here's a big, healthy man, wi' that graund land at Broomielaws—graund land, five hunder acre o't—a thousand pound in the bank, if he has a penny, and as fine a judge o' kye as is on this side o' the Forth: and ye turn up your nose at him! Fie, ye! Gie me my muffler, and tell Aleck to yoke the mare. And, mind ye, show me none o' your perky ways wi' Broomielaws!"

A shade of decision in her father's voice, the reflection of a more fixed intention within him, alarmed Julia, and she stole to the kitchen-door to watch him drive off in his gig. She pictured him picking up Broomielaws at the end of his own road, where he had been hanging over the stile waiting—middle-aged, pronounced, clad in a blue coat of a cut of forty years ago, from which emerged on the upper side a neck encased in a stock that cut his bare red cheeks, and below, long legs in tight breeches. She pictured him without a touch of caricature: saw him mount the gig, sitting high above her father, and the two swaying and bumping over the ups and downs to St. Brise market. She was not nervously observant, but she could see all that; and it showed her to be out of her usual habit that she cast a thought after the pair ere she turned to her afternoon's work.

She turned to it with a sense of unquiet. The spring sunlight flooding the windows, the tender

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green of the trees beyond, the lazy cattle under them, the breeze skipping in through the porch, and the fragrances and flavours it brought with it—all these things unnerved her. New and indescribable humours welled up within her. An ineffable sadness, derived from all things about her, it seemed, filled her with pleasure and alarm. She went out to look at some linen drying on a hedge. What a day it was! How freshly the air smelled; how blue—like turquoise—lay the sea beyond the dip o' the fields!

On the blue there hung a white speck; she knew it—the sail of Leslie's yacht running straight for Torrie Town. It was not of Leslie she was thinking; yet the sail struck a note within her, and note succeeded note in a strange, plaintive, dissatisfied melody. It expressed foreign feelings that had been gathering for weeks—ever since that Artillery ball of which her father had spoken. She could not have pointed to anything that had happened then, or since, to account for the change in her. Her meeting with Leslie could not. Only, the angle of her vision had become more obtuse: she saw ever so little wider; and that little taught her of immense possibilities. She was aware of no definite wish to see more, to know or to feel more. Tarpow and Broomielaws and Torrie Town had been her world, bounded by an infinity, for measuring which, somehow, St. Brise gave her a line. Now that her world had stretched to take in St. Brise, the infinite beyond was driven farther off and become immensely greater. And this young Leslie, as young as herself, with whom she had danced, who sailed across the Firth to Torrie Town to meet her (he told her so: she thought of it as of a

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fact only)—he, too, widened her world for her, and in a dim, inexplicable way, the bounds of the mystery beyond her horizon.

She, herself, would go down to Torrie Town this afternoon on her father's errand. To that decision the thought of Leslie's landing there was one determining consideration only. She wished the walk, more of the air, the fresh breeze from the sea, more movement—anything to soothe this disquiet within her.

The main road past Tarpow leads straight to Torrie harbour. Torrie Town lies on the east side of the basin, and creeps across and up the hill behind it. The harbour is scooped out of the sheer brown rock, which throws back the grey and gold and blue of the Baltic craft, and the black water in it reflects all that colour steadily. Mrs. Pratt's inn stands on the pier-head, beyond the saw-mill; so Julia came down by the harbour instead of skirting the hill above and descending by the High Gait. As she stepped on to the pier, the reflection of her in her light print in the basin startled the quiet of the place. The few eyes in it were turned upon her, and in a minute Leslie was at her side.

"Oh, Teddy," she said, giving him her hand.

She spoke as if she had forgotten about him and his yacht; and she had forgotten.

"Here on a Saturday, Julia! What's wrong at Tarpow?"

She touched her basket:

"Famine."

Leslie was in a chronic excitement at the thought of Julia—a glorious girl like this, whom to see, he

had to sail his yacht across the Forth. He was very much in love with the yacht, and he was very much in love with himself. Julia—the mere fact of Julia—ministered to both feelings. Besides, he was very young.

“Was it famine in the land, or drought?” he asked.

There was a glowing anger in her. She was as little sensible as any country girl ought to be of the talk of the neighbours; but here——. They had evidently gossiped to Leslie of her father’s frailty, as they might of the barrenness of Tarpow’s land. Her father fought the barrenness—with failing spirit, it is true; but he fought it. He made no effort against the other. The burden of that lay on Julia’s shoulders. Yet she had fought it, as she would have fought nettles in the field corners, or dandelions in the bleaching-green—steadily and impersonally. For the first time, now that Leslie took to hinting at the work, she was ashamed of the need of it.

“I was coming up this afternoon,” Leslie went on, without awaiting an answer, and her anger fled. There was something in his boyish ways, his voice, and his looks, that responded to the new emotion of the morning.

“Why! My father’s at market.” There was not a touch of coquetry in her manner of saying this, for she laughed, as much as to confess, “As if it were he you were coming to see.”

And he said, “I know he’s away”; and they laughed together.

By this time they had walked round the basin, and stood at the head of the pier, regarding the yacht which lay at the end of it.

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"Isn't she a beauty?" Leslie said. "She's a trim little thing. A little heavily sparred, maybe—eh?—but I like her lines."

Julia put her head on one side, and with a connoisseur's toss of it, "H'm, yes," she said; and she mocked his voice and words and critical air to a nicety.

For the first time he thought of more than himself and her comeliness, and was amazed at her cleverness. Poor young cub! She was only new to him. She wasn't clever. His own sisters, at the moment golfing on the other side of the Forth, had nimbler wits than she, by far.

"Bravo!" he cried. "Now she deserves her name!"

"What d'ye call her?"

"The *Julia*."

"*Julia*?"

"Yes, *Julia*. Bob Pratt's painting it on her now."

"Then Bob Pratt'll just paint it out again," she said, leading the way down the pier with a decision which Bob's grin, as he looked up at her from his paint-pot, approved. The grin projected the popular opinion on the subject.

Leslie, following her in chagrin, could only say: "You must christen her, then."

She had no nimbleness of wits to suggest a name on the instant, but she had nimbleness of manner. There was an old gin-bottle lying on the pier-head, and she stooped to it. Leslie also stooped, and picked it up for her, and, as they rose together, she saw something in his face that changed her intention.

"Oh! very well," she cried, and smashed the bottle on the yacht's bows: "I christen her the *Julia*."

It was the war of sense and sensibility. Her good sense was derived from the conditions of her life. To-day, now that she was bursting into womanhood, the conditions of her life bred sensibility.

But she would not stay longer. In no case should she have allowed him to accompany her: she did not care that he should see what was her errand to Mrs. Pratt's. To-day—to-day all things were altered, their relationship among the rest. That which she saw in Leslie's face may have been the image of her own feeling. For her, at any rate, it changed everything between them; and, had she known it, the reserve and withdrawal it led her to were the most potent steps she could have taken to affect him.

She made her purchase, and soon was out again upon the Tarpow road. The heat was more suffused, the sunshine a shade more golden. The wind from the sea crept up behind her, near the ground. The road was empty. Yonder, on either side of it, Tarpow and Broomielaws lay slumbering under their red-tiled night-caps. There was a lull in her dissatisfaction—an interlude of reaction, in which Tarpow and even Broomielaws wore a homely air. This grew upon her as she entered the house. Everything was as when she left. The doors stood open, the cattle browsed under the trees, the wind rustled delicately about the porch, and bore in upon her the fragrances of the earth. And to these things, which in the morning had hemmed her in with the tight grip of their familiarity, she turned now with a sense of restfulness.

Her awakened womanliness, from which she was seeking to escape, had touched into life in Leslie a new sensation. Bob Pratt dug about its roots and

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watered it with his gossip of the life old Tarpow led his daughter, and the marriage he sought for her. The new chivalry, love, call it what you will, sprouted like a mushroom, and Leslie was half-way to Tarpow before he could word his purpose.

From the end of the Tarpow road he caught a glimpse of Julia in the yard. The breeze wound her print daintily about her lissom figure. She wore no hat above the straight hair wisped into a broad, flat coil. The sunlight swirling within the dish—red without, yellow within—which her arched arm held to her side, lit up Julia herself in the middle of the rough-and-tumble crowd of poultry she was feeding. Julia among her poultry discovered a country girl with her rusticity rounded with a considerable elegance and knowledge, derived from her father in early days. It was her father's humour, not hers, that had named a flighty old hen "Atalanta," and a combative cock with a very dissonant crow "Anacreon." But the fight with his land had so demoralized him now that she had as little discernment of his better nature as of his ill condition.

Julia cleaned her fingers, all sticky with the hens' meat, on the side of the basin, and washed them in the overflow of the horse-trough. Next, she visited the calves' house, and went to the straw-loft to gather the eggs which the clucking hens announced. She clambered up the straw massed in the back of the barn, and stood among the rafters. From there she looked down to some loose straw heaped on the floor in a soft bed. The memory of earlier days swam in her head.

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Man's life's a vapour, full of woes;
He cuts a caper, and—off he goes,

she chanted, and clapped her hands, and jumped down to the soft bed, startling the sitting hens, which clucked and beat their wings among the rafters. She climbed and flopped, and climbed and flopped again, until at length she sank, hot and breathless and laughing, at the foot of the heap.

And there Leslie found her.

Her thoughts when he darkened the doorway were not of the wonder of his being there. She forgot that in her concern to account for her flustered condition. Then she did what the old Julia might have been expected to do at once. She told him how delightful it was to flop from the height of the straw, and showed him how it was done, and bade him follow her. And so, for a few minutes again, the barn was full of the sound of scared poultry, and of the rhymes jerked from these two breathless children, and of their smothered ejaculations.

Then the whole thing was spoiled. At any rate, that is how the old Julia would have thought of it; she could never again be the old Julia. For over him, like the cloud-shadows scudding over the fields outside, swept the thought that this was not what he had come there for; and the thought swept on and shadowed her. His words outran his purpose. When he talked of love she did not recognize it, so little had she thought of it or dreamed of it. All she knew was that it was exactly what she had been waiting for—so satisfying to her there in his arms, with his kisses on her hot face. Why should she remain at Tarpow?

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Why, indeed? Tarpow was a prison; its ways, its very scenes, gripped at her heart now. And Broomielaws: her father would marry her to him—to it rather. Oh! Teddy knew it all. All Torrie Town knew it, and perhaps St. Brise as well—knew it from Tarpow's own lips, it seemed. At that thought she became conscious of herself, of her physical self, inch by inch, the body which she robed and could touch, as well as of this intangible thing within her that was quick to-day for the first time. This—all this—was to be sold by her father. He talked of the sale. Was he worth her care more? Was he worth the sacrifice of life? of love? For she saw them both now, or thought she saw them—love and sacrifice.

It was Teddy's plan. The yacht lay at Torrie pier. They dared not sail from there; but he could moor the yacht in the bay to the eastwards, at the caves, and row Julia out to her from the jetty; and she should go with him, go with him for always. He had no one in the world save her. There were his sisters, to be sure; but they would welcome her in the old house, on the other side of the Firth, where she might look over to the smoke of Torrie Town, but never again beat her wings against the bars, as at Tarpow. Julia might have known—at any other time would have known—how idle it all was. But to-day her whole being swam to the vision. She would await her father's return. With him would come Broomielaws—red, vast, middle-aged, brutal. She had never thought of him so before, and she shut her eyes, and her mind's eye, on the horrid sight, and opened them upon the future Teddy painted. She would await their return, and Broomielaws' depar-

ture. By eleven o'clock the house would be quiet: then she would steal down to the jetty at the caves. She would be there, if she were coming at all, half an hour after midnight.

It was the old story: love is an instinct as well as a passion; and it was the instinct of love only that was working in these two.

Leslie became wiser with every step he took from Tarpow. He was not a very far-seeing hobbledehoy; but there are some things that come up very close to the eyes, and an elopement with Julia was one of them.

"Here's a devil of a mess!" he was saying to himself at the main-road turn; and by the time he got to Torrie pier the affair had become one of many devils. He had no thoughts of drawing back, however, but got on board and stood up for the bay at the caves very bravely, and lay there, tossed about between his admiration for Julia and wrath with himself.

With Julia it was different. Her mood, such as it was, had come with a draught of spring which every atom of her body absorbed till it became newly constituted. The appetite of the woman, newly unchained by consciousness now, would have upleapt had not pressing duties kept it under. Julia had many things to attend to. Leslie's leave-taking had been hastened by the return of the ploughmen, which was irregular in this off-season of the year. The bothy-boys were hungry, and she had to make porridge to appease them, and the cows had to be milked. The return of her father with Broomielaws found her finishing her work calmly enough; but when she lifted her busy hand from off her agitation, it fluttered within her.

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Tarpow took the beatings of it for the fulfilment of his instructions. The maid, he thought, had put off her perky ways, and was clothed in assent. He was seated as straight as an old man could be, close up to the table, brewing toddy for himself and for Broomielaws, who lolled in the armchair with his long legs bent stiffly in front of him—like a locust's, or a spinning-jenny's, thought Julia, as she set a bit of supper. Tarpow watched her out of the corner of his eyes. She had a large graciousness always that was something akin to grace; but to-night her bountifulness had a sparkle in it. Her womanliness was in the bud. Tarpow had angled for Broomielaws artfully and persistently with the artificial lure of Julia's domestic virtues, and had found him a lumpish biter at best. That night Julia was a natural bait at which he came with a rush. That he was a very ill-conditioned, unseasonable fish mattered little to Tarpow, chuckling over the sport. The quarry was not a son-in-law, but a son-in-law's land; and Julia assenting was not a daughter angling for a husband, but a daughter in conspiracy with himself for five hundred acres.

Tarpow's sly grimaces and Broomielaws' ardour defeated their ends by spurring Julia in her resolve. On the other hand, her resolve was like to defeat itself, for its *verve* drew on Broomielaws until the man was breathless in his pursuit.

When at length he rose to go, and her father went to the door with him—both unsteady in their gait—she accompanied them. To both men the act seemed unusually gracious: they were not to know that it was to see how the night fared that she went.

Broomielaws' way lay across the fields—Tarpow's and his own—and her father walked with him to the edge of the yard. From there they watched the girl in the doorway who was looking out upon the night. The spring air still lingered; but, above, the wind was high, and the moon drove across the sky through clouds. She felt Broomielaws' eyes upon her. She burned a kiss upon her palm, and flung it towards the caves. She could not know that she should have flung the kiss to herself.

When her father re-entered the house, she would have sent him to bed immediately, but he set himself on his chair again.

"Sit down, Jooley. Sit down, girl," he said.

The formality, and what he would have called the "English" turn, of his speech, registered the degrees of his insobriety.

"Jooley," he said, "you're like your mother t'-night."

A pompous exposition of the affair of Broomielaws and herself was exactly the thing for a drunken man to take up and enjoy. Besides, domestic sentiment is suited to one stage of intoxication. When he said, "You're like your mother, Jooley," this whisky sentiment was in his eyes and voice; and Julia's condition made her peculiarly sensitive to any sentiment, even of the limelights.

"Father," she said, crossing to him and sitting on the floor at his feet, "do you really think I'm in love with Broomielaws?"

"You're well off having Broomielaws in love with you," he caught her up with a laugh. "What is love?"

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How easy it would be to answer that question! thought Julia.

"I've buffeted the warl' this six-and-sixty years," he went on, "and I'll tell you what love is. What's everything? Just a yoke we yoke oursel's wi'. We saddle oursel's wi' duty. We put the bit o' morality 'tween our own teeth. Love?—just a pair o' blinkers, Jooley. Ah! we can keek round the corner, fine. We gang straight in front o's—aince we've set our een in the proper airt—and mak'-believe we see nothing else. You've got your een set on Broomielaws—I saw it the nicht—sensible lass the nicht, Jooley—like your mother. Noo, just put on the blinkers, and say 'Broomielaws the inevitable! Mari'ge made in heaven.' My inevitable son-in-law—Broomielaws!"

Her mood was such that her father's speech amused as much as it pained. She said, half to herself, "I have got the blinkers on," and turned her eyes straight to the corner of the house that faced the bay at the caves. That was in the direction of Broomielaws also, and the old man grinned.

"There's more nor a'man there, Jooley. There's fields, fat fields, but they maun be husbanded. I'll husband them. And you, Jooley, you'll husband love—it maun be husbanded too. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but if ye dinna dung! Broomielaws! Mrs. Broomielaws! Young Broomielawses!—all inside the blinkers."

He hiccoughed, and wept, and staggered to his feet; and the coming of her opportunity drove out the anger that was in her.

The clocks were on the stroke of midnight ere

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Julia was clear of the house. She had said that she would be at the caves by half-past twelve at the latest: that gave her half an hour only to cover the ground, and she took to the fields. She gave herself no time to consider that Leslie would wait on her, that he would be on the way to meet her. Leslie himself was less in her mind than the fact that she had an arrangement to meet him, to be taken away from Tarpow. Her way was Broomielaws' short-cut home, across Tarpow's fields and his own; only, a park's breadth from Broomielaws she must make a point or two to the south and descend upon the caves. The moon was behind a cloud, and her only guide beyond her instinct for the way was the light of the May. The going was rough; but she laboured on, until a sharp jerk in a ditch-drain at the edge of her own land brought her up against a paling to draw a clear breath.

As she leaned on it for a moment, the moon shook itself free of the clouds. Everything was still, except that the hum of the sea was louder here than westwards at Tarpow. A plough lay at the corner of the field, almost at her feet, and on the instant of wondering how she should have escaped tripping on it, her eye caught a heap beside it. It was not to be mistaken; and the humorous thought—and it took the edge off her disgust—was that Broomielaws' tightly breeched legs were specially hideous when he was in drink. She had started running again, when a something in the heap caused her to return and look a little closer. The collar cutting the neck and cheeks was redder than the cheeks and neck themselves. Accustomed as she was to accidents and wounds, she saw in an instant that he had fallen into

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the danger she had missed, and had struck his head upon the coulter; and at the same moment she had found the wound and was assuaging it.

To her skilled eye the seriousness of Broomielaws' condition gaped like his wound, and all her purpose of that night ran out of her. But it left in her a solicitude for the man in her arms, which would have been impossible had she not harboured the false sentiment that she threw off as soon as an appeal to her practical self set it in its true light. At the same time, it did not cause her to forget the stark facts of her condition. She could not leave him thus to search for help; yet, whether she brought help or attracted it, how could she account for her presence there at that time of night? That made action easier, for the only alternative was to return to Tarpow—she never gave going on to the caves a thought now—and keep silence concerning Broomielaws. If that course crossed her mind, it did not linger. Keeping her handkerchief tight to the wound, she ransacked the man's pockets until she found matches. The hidden moon favoured her plan, and the lights, as she struck them, flared brightly against the darkness. It was a random shot to aid her shouts for help. On market night some wandering ploughman might be hieing home from Torrie Town across the fields. Twice as the moon glinted through the rack, she thought she saw a figure between her and the coast, the second time nearer her and close to the hedgerow that ran from her side.

By and by a singularly sweet piping smote her ear. It came delicately through the night in the strains of a Jacobite air, becoming louder and louder,

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until a rustling down the hedge-side told her that the piper was near. A shyness came upon her like a shiver, and she drew her cloak close up to her eyes, as if that might hide her. Before she could make out the gaunt, wizened old man, with coal-black face and hands, she knew whom to expect.

"Rab Cuick!"

"Mistress Hay!"

Her alert nature threw off its shyness. She motioned him to kneel at the other side of her from Broomielaws, discovering the wound meanwhile.

"It's Broomielaws' tatties you're after, Rab," she said sternly.

"I'm lying o' nights at the pit-head fire," he grumbled; "but I'm hungry, and not so supple as I used to be, and Broomielaws' tatties——"

He was fumbling with an excuse, and with a chamois-leather case for his flute, as black as his hands. She felt in her pocket. Two half-crowns lay in it—her only dowry to Leslie—and she held them up between Rab's eyes and the moon.

"Go to Broomielaws," she said. "Send one of the bothy-boys to Torrie Town for the doctor, and then rouse the others and bring them on here. You found him here, Rab; and you'll carry him to Tarpow, and waken me up. You understand?"

Rab's face was as stolid as the paling-stab when he held out his hand for the half-crowns.

"When you bring—this—to Tarpow," she said, slipping the coins into her pocket again.

Rab Cuick had been gone some twenty minutes, when the faint sound of voices from Broomielaws came to Julia's ear. As the sound drew near, she

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could make out that Rab was bellowing unnecessary directions. A break in the clouds discovered him and his following making straight for her and drawing her cloak round her, she slipped through the hedge, and ran for Tarpow.

When she let herself in everything was quiet. She raked together the red cinders in the fireplace, and set the kettle on them. She looked into the cupboard and made certain that there was brandy there. Her father was snoring upstairs as she stole to her room and ransacked her workbasket and presses for linen for bandages. When she stole downstairs again, and listened at the door, there was a sound of voices in the yard.

From the noise he made, it was evident that Rab Cuick thought that the Tarpow household slept deep. When Julia opened the door, Broomielaws' foreman was very terse in describing what had happened, and led the way to the spare bedroom with his load; but Rab, who followed, was loudly apologetic about wakening up Julia at such an untimely hour. He followed the ploughman down again, after a short interview with Julia in the bend of the staircase.

"There's a receipt, Miss Jooley," he had said, as he pocketed the half-crowns; and handed her her own handkerchief, smeared with blood and coal-dust.

It was very honourable of Rab, of course; but Julia got hot with chagrin at the act.

Broomielaws was laid upon the bed until the arrival of the doctor. When he came, Julia left him and stepped across the passage into her father's room. Once or twice she was called to minister to the wants of the case, but she did not linger. At length she

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heard Tarpow and the doctor descend, and by and by her father came up to her.

"You can put them off," he girmed.

"What? Put what off?" she asked.

"The blinkers," he said, with a snap.

That meant death, and her woman's tears came instinctively; yet a smile, half-amused, half-scornful, fought with them for a place in her eyes and on her face. To hide their conflict, she turned to the window and pulled aside the blind. The moon lay on the bay, and on the waters beyond it, and with almost spiteful emphasis lit up a little speck of white sail well over to the other side. Evidently Leslie had not lingered at their tryst a minute behind the hour.

At the stab to her pride that the discovery gave, the blind dropped from her hand. The next instant she had plucked it aside, as if to scourge her mature sense with the sight of her raw humours.

"So that is the end of that," she thought, as she watched the white sail mount to the opposite shore. She would never marry Broomielaws; that had been settled for her. Whether she ever could have married him was beyond consideration now; yet it seemed to her that it was as likely she should have married him as that she should marry this laddie, who was even now landing on the other side of the Forth. She was a girl when the boy came to her that morning, with the first touch of spring, the harbinger of her womanhood. The boy had sailed away from a woman, years older than himself in knowledge, and ripe in the consciousness of what the world held in store for her. No; she would never marry Teddy.

And, indeed, he did not ask her again.

BY
JANE H. FINDLATER



THE LITTLE TINKER

IT WAS a howling December night. An icy wind, laden with sleet, rushed down the glens; the whole face of Nature seemed washed with half-frozen tears. Every man and beast that could be under shelter had sought it hours ago, and yet here, trudging along the road, driven before the wind, scoured by the pitiless sleet, came a woman and two young children. To say that they were wet through is not to express their condition at all; for the water had not only soaked their garments, but was running down off them in streams. And such garments as they were! The eldest child had on, apparently, nothing but a man's coat—or little else—it was tied round him by the sleeves; while the other boy wore a woman's skirt fastened round his throat and gathered in at the waist with a bit of string. Their small mop-like heads, innocent of hats, had for once received a thorough washing that night; for the water ran down from their tangled and curly locks, half-blinding the poor little things.

The mother was a tall* finely made woman. A faded green tartan shawl fell cornerwise from her shoulders almost to her heels, and on her crisply

curled yellow hair she wore a knitted woollen cap. She carried a bundle of tin cans that clashed together as the wind beat against them.

This sorry band of wayfarers was the advance-guard of the Reid tribe—a gang of tinkers well known in that district of Scotland. When I say the advance-guard, it becomes necessary to explain why Mary Reid should be struggling alone through the winter's night with her children. The explanation was very simple. The men of the tribe (and really under the circumstances they might perhaps be excused) were all drunk, lying in a heap some way out of the village, their tents and tent sticks, their bundles, their bagpipes, and even their donkey, unregarded beside them. The rain and sleet lashed down upon them and they slept on, having—poor wretches—attained to a Paradise of a sort, where cold and misery were forgotten for a time. The donkey, with the philosophy of his species, had turned his tail to the storm, and stood there beside his prostrate masters, an image of grotesque endurance.

The two other women of the tribe were begging through the village, secure (in such a storm) of getting food to exist upon the next day. It was no uncommon thing for the Reid men to be thus overtaken, and in ordinary circumstances Mary would have thought nothing of it. But to-night her situation was desperate, for another wholly unnecessary little tinker was just going to be added to the tribe. Her other children had been born under the stars, one of them in July, the other on a warm autumn night; but this was a different matter altogether. Inured as she was to every kind of privation, Mary could not

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face this. Instinct warned her that she must find some sort of shelter if the tiny flame of the new life was not to be blown out by this icy wind that came roaring down the glens.

She stood by the roadside and looked contemptuously at the men sleeping their heavy sleep out under the storm, and questioned whether it would be possible to waken them up enough to pitch a tent for her. Then, shaking her head, she called to Jackie and Gib to come on. The children had a saving terror of the men when they were drunk, so they needed only an occasional threat to urge them forward through the storm; thus they struggled on in the darkness, having reached, it would appear, almost the lowest ebb of human misery. Someone had given each of the poor little mites a crust, however; and they kept gnawing away at these for consolation. They passed across a bridge, and Mary stood leaning against the stone coping for a minute to rest herself. The burn was in such flood that it sent up a hoarse sound into the night like the shout of a multitude, as it rushed down.

The woman groaned aloud, then gathered up her load of cans and moved on again. In the distance a light glimmered through the darkness—it was the window of the Glen Farm. The question was whether Mary could ever reach the house. For herself, she would gladly have lain down by the dyke-side and taken her chance of life or death; but the blind protective instinct at her heart urged her on; she must attain to shelter before the baby entered this freezing world.

The Glen Farm kitchen was heated to suffocation that bitter night—doors and windows tightly shut—no modern ideas of ventilation tolerated there for a moment. Macpherson, the farmer, and his wife sat by the fire and talked on, as only country-people can, about exactly the same subjects they had discussed for months past. Suddenly, without knock or call, the back door flew open, and, heralded by a blast of icy wind, two dolorous little figures burst into the warm room.

“Mither’s deein’ oot bye!” Jockie screamed, his voice shrill with terror, while Gib just stood there as if paralyzed, his small frozen purple toes gripping the warm boards of the floor, water pouring from his rags and collecting in a pool all round him.

Macpherson started up from his seat, and his wife let the knitting fall from her hands.

“Gosh me, laddies! What’s that you’re sayin’?” she cried. “What’s wrong with yer mither?”

“I dinna ken,” Jockie sobbed; “but she’s deein’.”

“Where’s yer faither then?” the mistress asked. She knew the Reid family intimately; many a “puckle tea” she had doled out to them in her day.

“Faither’s drunk, east at the village,” the child replied, as if it were the most natural explanation possible—as indeed it was.

Macpherson went to fetch his lantern, fixed an end of candle in it, and moved to the door.

“I’ll see till’t,” he said over his shoulder to his wife. The blast that met him beyond the shelter of the doorway blew out the lantern, and sturdy as he was the man staggered before its impact. A wild

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night this, he thought, for even tinkers to be on the road.

"Where is she, laddie?" he demanded of Jockie. "The light'll no' keep in for the wind—where is she?" It was so dark they could scarcely see a hand's breadth before them, and all round them came the storm pressing and buffeting them like a host of unseen foes.

"She's in by, alongside the cairts," Jockie whimpered.

Macpherson felt his way by the wall, passing the closed doors of the byre and the stable where his cows and horses had long been cosily housed from the storm. Then across the yard he groped, Jockie in close attendance, and reached the cart-shed at last.

"Hi! Are ye there, Mary Reid?" he cried into the thick darkness. A groan came from the far end of the shed, but no answer.

Macpherson groped past the carts, and in their shelter got out a box of matches. Then, shielding the flame with his hand, he managed to light the lantern again. Mary Reid had crept to the back of the shed, and lay there on a heap of dried bracken. As the flickering light fell upon her face, Macpherson could see that it had a strange deathly colour under its tanned skin. The rain from her drenched clothing had soaked even the bracken she lay upon.

"Eh, wumman, but ye're wet! It's an awfu' night this!" he exclaimed.

"I'm waur than wet," the poor soul cried. "Will the mistress no' help me till I hae my bairn? I'm gey bad the noo."

Here indeed was a job for the mistress, as her

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husband confessed. He was a kindly man, and the desperate plight the woman was in would have touched any heart.

"Hoot aye, I'll gang for her in a minit," he said, reassurance in his voice. He strode across the yard again and re-entered the kitchen.

"Yer wantit," he said curtly, jerking his thumb across his shoulder in the direction of the barn, and then went on to explain the situation at greater length.

To a certain type of uneducated woman any excitement, even an unpleasant one, is welcome. Mrs. Macpherson had been dull enough as she sat knitting by the fire that evening; she could not pretend to be disinclined for this adventure.

"We must get the poor crater in," she said. "You'd not leave a beast out in yon shed on such-a-like night." She had all her wits about her in a moment. Macpherson was directed to keep an eye on Jockie and Gib in case they should pilfer anything (for the Reid honesty was not above reproach) while she and "the lass", a huge red-armed young woman, went out to attend upon the sufferer.

Left to himself in the kitchen, with the two tinker children, the farmer concluded that no Christian could allow them to remain as wet and cold as they were.

"Bide there and dinna stir till I come back!" he commanded them. Then he lit a candle and went up the creaking wooden stairs to the bedroom above, there to find some coverings for the two little melancholies in the kitchen.

There were no children's clothes in the house, for

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his own family had all grown up and dispersed long ago. With Scottish thrift the good man shrank from giving his own excellent flannel garments to the tinkers, so he looked over quite a pile of flannel shirts before he found two sufficiently old to sacrifice on the altar of philanthropy. They were found at last, however, and along with them Macpherson brought an old knitted rag-rug, which had seen better days. He descended the stairs carefully, with the bundle of clothing under his arm, the candle guttering in the draughts. Jockie and Gib had apparently obeyed his commands, for they were standing just where he had left them.

No illusions existed in Macpherson's mind as to the probable or possible cleanliness of the children; he knew only too well the sort of state they were in. But they were human beings, and he would not have let his dog lie out of doors on such a night. Plainly the children must be kept beside the fire till morning at least.

"Stop where ye are!" he commanded again, and plunged this time out into the night. In a few minutes he returned with a huge armful of dried bracken. Laid on the floor near the fire it made a bed such as Jockie and Gib had never before enjoyed. They would have cuddled down upon it just as they were, in their dripping rags, but Macpherson bade these be stripped off. Here an unexpected difficulty arose; for it was Mary Reid's simple habit to sew her children into their clothes at the beginning of winter, and wait until the garments fell off by processes of natural decay.

So, when commanded to undress, Jockie and Gib

found it impossible to obey—nor could they explain their plight. Macpherson seized the eldest child and got off his outer garment (the man's coat tied on by the sleeves); but the next layer of covering defied him. At last, grasping the situation, he got out his big clasp-knife and severed the stitches that held the rags together. Oh, if you had seen the poor little stiff empurpled bodies that were revealed as the rags fell off, and how grotesque the children looked when each of them had assumed one of the farmer's long flannel shirts! Macpherson laughed aloud; and Jockie and Gib, exhausted as they were, gave a skirl of delight.

"There ye are! get intil yer bed, laddies," he directed. The rag carpet was spread over them, they sank down into the soft warm bracken, and forgot all their childish woes in about half a second of time.

Macpherson then looked at the soaking, evil-smelling heap of rags that lay upon the floor and questioned what could be done with them. He would have liked to burn the sorry garments there and then, but they were much too wet to burn. So after a moment of consideration he gathered them up in the tongs, as a haymaker lifts a bundle of hay upon a fork, and marched out once more into the darkness to fling his unsavoury load upon the midden. It was obviously impossible to adopt any half-measures with the clothing of Jockie and Gib.

With an altruism that had elements of nobility in it—for *she kept a spotlessly clean house*—Mrs. Macpherson had urged her suffering fellow-sister to let them take her into the farm-house. But here the

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tinker woman was firm; she knew nothing of houses and had never slept upon a bed in her life. Shelter from the wind and rain was all she needed—she would “do fine in the shed.” This decision, however, was modified in so far that she moved into the byre, where the presence and breath of three cows had raised the temperature to a certain degree. There, in an empty stall, they made a wonderful bed of hay for her, and the lass was dispatched to the house for some dry coverings.

The cows, chinking their head-chains, turned to gaze with great liquid eyes at the human intruder who had come to disturb them—they could not understand all this commotion. . . . The shelter of the byre, the warm breath of the cows, and the bed of hay, formed a whole of luxury to Mary Reid such as she had never dreamed of before. So her richer and perhaps less fortunate sisters might regard a particularly well-appointed nursing-home.

She needed all her comforts, poor soul; for fatigue and exposure had told even on her splendid constitution. Mrs. Macpherson became a trifle nervous about her patient as the night wore on, and began to wish herself well through with the case. No well-intentioned legislator being at hand to inquire whether she was fully qualified, the good woman unquestionably did her best as a nurse, and trusted that Nature would supplement her deficiencies.

At last, just as the cold dawn broke, the little tinker was born: a beautiful child; a king might have envied him. The unqualified nurse got a drop of warm milk from the cow, put into it a good lashing of whisky, and administered the draught to her patient; then,

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looking rather wan after her night of anxiety, she stepped out into the chill morning air.

The storm had blown over; a last ragged mass of cloud, like the remnants of a defeated army, went straggling across the top of the hills, and in the clear greenish sky the morning star hung serene and brilliant above the place where the child lay.

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Mrs. Macpherson found herself face to face with a new and perplexing situation when she returned to the farm-house that morning.

For Jockie and Gib had wakened up very lively from their comfortable night beside the fire, yet quite destitute of clothing in which it would be possible for them to go out.

They were pattering about the kitchen in huge delight, each wrapped round in one of the farmer's thick flannel shirts. It was the gala day of their lives. Warmed, sheltered, fed high on porridge and milk—such bliss they had never dreamed of before. Already the lass had to complain of their thievish ways; hadn't she found Jockie with his hands in the sugar-basin when her back was turned for a moment? What on earth was to be done with them? she asked.

"Hoots! it's easy seen you've no' had a faim'ly to sort," said Mrs. Macpherson. She had reared eight children in her day, and felt perfectly equal to the task of quelling Jockie and Gib.

Two or three sharp smacks were administered, and the children were made to lie down on their impromptu bed again till some clothes were found for them. They lay cuddled together under the bracken and old carpet, exactly like two puppies, ready to

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jump out from their basket at a moment's notice. Their sharp little eyes followed Mrs. Macpherson round and round the kitchen, and occasionally one or other of the boys, as he caught sight of some coveted morsel, would break out in the indescribable tinker begging-whine, which has a cadence all its own:

"Gie's a wee bit bread if *you* please!"—or:

"Gie's a puckle sugar if *you* please!"—or:

"Gie's a droppie tea if *you* please!" till Mrs. Macpherson bade them be quiet on pain of being smacked once more, and this time with severity.

Clearly something must be done at once about providing the little imps with clothing.

"They'll have me a beggar like themselves!" Mrs. Macpherson exclaimed, for she saw that she must send the lass round to ask the neighbours for cast-off clothing if the children were to be got out of the house at all that day.

"Put on yer things, Jeanie," she directed the young woman, "and be off to the Manse to ask Mrs. Thomson has she some bits of things she could spare to cover the bairns; and there's Mrs. Macdonald, east at the shop, has wee bodies of her own—maybe she'd spare something. And if you see Mary Reid's man, tell him he's wanted here—big lazy loon that he is! Not that he'll do anything for his bairns—he doesn't care what comes of them; but I'll give him a hearin'."

Having dispatched Jeanie on her errand, Mrs. Macpherson thought that it was time to brew a cup of strong tea for her patient in the byre. But before leaving the kitchen, she called Tweed, the old red

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collie dog, a creature of almost human intelligence, and put him in charge of the children. He squatted beside them, and if they dared to stir gave a kindly but firm growl that completely quenched even the spirit of Jockie and Gib.

Stepping across the half-frozen mud of the yard, a steaming cup of tea in one hand, a bit of bread and butter in the other, Mrs. Macpherson advanced towards the byre. At the same moment someone else was coming across the yard also, and called out a cheerful greeting:

"Good morning, Mrs. Macpherson; this is a fine day after the storm. Where are you off to with that cup of tea, I'd like to know?"

The speaker was the last sort of person one would expect to see in a farmyard. She was a tall, rather fantastic-looking woman, with the ruins of beauty in both face and figure. Her large expressive eyes had great black circles under them, her thick hair was dashed with grey, and her skin had seen better days; yet with it all she was good to look at. An indefinable air of interest hung about her; she wore large gold loops in her ears, walked with a silver-headed stick, and dressed in clothes of a very modish cut.

Mrs. Macpherson laid down the cup of tea on the step of the byre, and shook hands cordially with her visitor.

"Deed, Miss Nellie," she said, "it's just a tinker-wife I've got in the byre."

Miss Nellie, as she was called by everyone, was extremely popular in the neighbourhood. There was about her a something romantic, unexplained, inter-

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esting, which—all unknown to themselves—captivated the country-people. They admired her appearance, laughed at her amusing high-handed manner that yet was so full of kindness, and were never tired of wondering how it was she “didna get a man” when women with half her charm had been “wooded and married and a’,” as the old song says.

True, Miss Nellie was fearfully eccentric; there was really nothing she would not do or say; but then she had money in abundance, and that should have weighed against a good deal of eccentricity. Her kind heart led her into many mistakes; but they were always generous mistakes. She kept a perfect menagerie of sick and miserable beasts and birds. Broken-kneed old horses rescued from hawkers’ carts, rabbits and cats found in traps, wounded birds—these she collected from far and near, bound up their wounds, fed and cherished them with both skill and tenderness. The shepherds and keepers knew that if they brought any such creatures to Miss Nellie she would receive the charge with delight, and the men always got a tip and “a glass” for their trouble.

With some knowledge of the strange character of her visitor, Mrs. Macpherson guessed that a sight of Mary Reid and the baby would interest her.

“Step into the byre, Miss Nellie, please, till I show ye what I’ve got there,” she said, smiling as she lifted the cup of tea from the doorstep and unlocked the door.

They stepped together into the byre and approached the stall where the invalid lay.

Mary Reid was now, by her own way of thinking, in the full enjoyment of the utmost luxury. Billows

of dry, warm hay and bracken surrounded her, she was piled with heavy blankets, and her head rested on a sack stuffed with hay.

The little tinker also, to judge by appearances, seemed to be thoroughly enjoying this his first day in the Vale of Tears. Cradled in his mother's arms, his little head burrowed deep in her warm and ample breast, he slept profoundly. Mrs. Macpherson had scant respect for his slumbers. She leant down and lifted him from his blissful dreams.

"See what a braw laddie we've got here, Miss Nellie!" she said, almost as proud of the child as if it had been her own.

"Bless me! There's a baby, is there?" Miss Nellie exclaimed. "Which of the tinkers is it? It's so dark in here I can't see who it is."

"Mary Reid—you'll see in a minute when yer eyes get used with the dark."

Well Miss Nellie knew the whole hopeless Reid tribe; she could name every man and woman of them. She leant down towards the invalid in her kindly way, laying her white hand on Mary's shoulder for a moment.

"So it's you, Mary? and you've got another baby—well, I'm glad you're in here, not out in the tents in such weather."

An upturned box had been put beside the bed to serve as table or chair, and Miss Nellie sat on it now and commanded Mrs. Macpherson to give the baby into her arms. She looked at him admiringly.

"Well, I must say he's a fine child, Mary," she said; "you've every reason to be proud of him; but on my word, I think there are enough of you without

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this one! Richard and his wife have five, and Rab has four, and now you and Jock have three—there's the round dozen to feed without counting the grown-ups. The countryside won't support you all soon!"

Mary began in her whimpering tinker voice to acquiesce in this plain statement of her family's situation.

"Deed and it's a puir cauld life we hae o' it, my leddy!" she said.

"It is; but you seem to like it better than any other, or you wouldn't lead it."

Mary only grunted before the undeniable logic of this remark. She thought the speech a very hard one; it is never pleasant to have our faults put plainly before us.

Miss Nellie sat in silence for a minute, looking down at the child she held. She was wondering and questioning, in hopeless modern fashion, why this child had come into being. Years would in all probability only turn him into a man like his father—a useless, idle vagabond, thievish and drunken. Yet he was such a fine boy—it seemed cruel.

"The poor body had an awful time of it last night," Mrs. Macpherson began, anxious to expatiate upon Mary's sufferings; but Miss Nellie cut her short.

"Ah, well, that's over and done with; the question is, what's to become of the child?"

Both the women looked at her in surprise; the mother stared with not much more comprehension of the question than a sheep or a cow might have shown if questioned about the fate of its young; Mrs. Macpherson had only a glimmer of greater understanding.

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"Is he just to grow up like the rest of them?" Miss Nellie repeated, speaking perhaps more to herself than to her hearers. Then, a minute later, she added impulsively:

"Give him to me, Mary; I'll educate him, I'll make a man of him and lift him out of this wretched life you all lead!"

"Eh, Miss Nellie! mind what ye're about!" Mrs. Macpherson cried, with scant respect for the feelings of Mary Reid. A tinker's bairn!—they're all alike!" What she meant to imply by this ambiguous saying it was not difficult to guess. The mother, listening to this conversation, was bewildered.

"What's that, my leddy?" she asked; "I dinna a'thegither ken what ye're sayin'."

"I'm saying, will you give the boy to me to bring up? I'll be very good to him—I'm sure you know that, Mary."

"Ech, aye, that ye wad!"

"Well, it's a fair offer, and I'll stick to it if you make up your mind to give him to me. Take a day or two to think over it—see what your man says—and then let me know."

Miss Nellie handed the little tinker back to his mother's arms as she spoke, and rose from her seat beside the bed. "Are you all right here?" she asked. "A byre isn't a very comfortable place in this weather."

"I'm a wee thing ower warm, my leddy," Mary admitted as she received the baby under the blankets. It was the only fault she had to find with the Nursing Home.

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Jeanie came back from her begging expedition with a large bundle of clothing for the children.

The story of the tinker baby that had come into the world on such a wild night touched every maternal heart, and a quantity of infant's clothing had been given along with the larger garments for Jockie and Gib.

"My word! they're in luck the day!" Mrs. Macpherson cried, as she looked over the bundle. "We can get rid of the bairns now they've got clothes to their backs."

She had no wish to harbour Jockie and Gib a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

The task of dressing these little imps was no easy one. As well might she have attempted to dress a pair of grasshoppers. Buttons, strings, hooks and eyes, were all unknown and foolish nonsense to the children, who, as has been explained, had never been hampered by these products of over-civilization. To be compelled to stand still while bands were tied round their waists and buttons fastened at their throats, seemed to them altogether superfluous. Only by a firm system of cuffs and smacks was it accomplished. Then Mrs. Macpherson spread two enormous scones with treacle, gave one to each of the children, opened the door, and chased them out of the house.

"Off ye go! Away and seek yer faither—tell him ye've a fine wee brother east there in the byre," she called after them.

But Jockie and Gib needed no hastening from the farm kitchen; they had had enough of imprisonment within four walls, and made a joyous rush into the

chill outer air the moment the door was opened.

The scattered members of the Reid tribe were gathering themselves together by this time. The men had risen from their drunken sleep very stiff and miserable, only to find that the women and children were not there. During the tempest of the previous night they had wisely sought shelter in an old half-roofed cottage which stood empty just then, waiting to be pulled down. Now they came straggling along the road in search of their men-kind. They had collected a certain amount of food—bits of bread, a hunk of cheese, and so on; it was time now to get the tents put up. Well the women knew the sort of tempers the men would be in; there was not much illusion left in these wifely hearts. They knew also that the men had decided to have a spree of several days' duration. One of them had had the luck to find an oyster-shell which contained a fairly good pearl, and this had been sold to an innkeeper for a sovereign. Such a bit of dazzling good fortune came to the tinker men perhaps once in four or five years, though they were constantly fishing, in an idle, unscientific manner, in those rivers where pearls may sometimes be found. Their one way of celebrating such luck was to drink until the money was exhausted. So it was only a question this morning of how long it would be before they were drunk again! The women calculated that it might be possible to get their husbands to put up the tents for them before they went off to buy more whisky; but they knew it would be a difficult matter.

One of the ladies, more artful than the others, de-

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cided to boil some water and make tea for her lord and master before she mooted the question of the tents. Do you know the tinker's "tinny"?—that small pitcher, shiny with the smoke of a hundred wood fires, that is never out of their hands? No wonder in their comfortless lives that they cling to their "tinnies" and would wheedle tea to boil in them from a heart of stone!

It was no easy job to light a fire this morning; but those who have been accustomed to light fires under every climatic disadvantage for a lifetime do not find it impossible. By dint of coaxing and blowing, a thin column of smoke began to rise at last by the dyke-side; and with the exercise of almost uncanny skill the water was got to boil. Even a mouthful of warm tea had a mollifying effect on the gaunt, blue-lipped men. One of them set off to find the donkey, which had strayed down the road and was snatching some innutritious morsels of winter grass from the ditch. The other two men shouldered the tent withies and the sodden rags that were to cover them, and slouched off towards the nearest camping-place.

All over the country there are these recognized camping-grounds where the tinkers are allowed to pitch their tents and light their fires. In this instance the selected spot was down by a burn-side, where a high wooded bank completely shut off the east wind. All the ground here had charred spots on it where bygone fires had once been lit. It was a popular halting-place because there were plenty of sticks to be found in the wood, and plenty of water in the burn—the burn which in the summer flowed along with a sweet brawling sound, but was hoarse to-day with

the winter rains.

The advantages of these well-known camping-places are obvious; for the scattered members of a gang are sure to find each other if not in one such place, then in another not very far off. If there is any uncertainty as to direction, owing to cross-roads, they resort to the old gipsy and tinker habit of the "patteran"—laying one or two handfuls of grass at the cross-roads, twisted towards the direction that has been taken.

Jockie and Gib were in no difficulty as to where to find their belongings. They had camped a hundred times down by the same burn-side, and made straight for it now, appearing at the top of the wooded bank just as the three tents had been pitched below it.

The children were, of course, scarcely recognizable in their grand new clothes. For a moment the women thought that two little villagers on their way from school had strayed into the camp. Then with monkey-like agility Jockie and Gib came tumbling through the alder bushes and down the bank, leaving no doubt at all about their identity.

"Mither's lyin' east at thê Glen Farm, an' she's got a wee laddie!" was their shrill announcement. It was received without any excitement. What, to the Reids, was an additional child more or less? Far more exciting were the wonderful clothes of Jockie and Gib. In a very few moments it was decided that the children were much too well dressed, and had quite an undue share of warm clothing ("toggerie", they named it, in their quaint old cant speech).

Now, much as they had objected to putting on their new garments Jockie and Gib resented even

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more being deprived of them. It takes a wonderfully short time to become accustomed to comfort, and half an hour had convinced the children that warm clothes were a good thing. So they bit and scratched like little cats in their efforts to retain possession of them. All in vain, however, for it needed no discernment to see that such well-dressed children would excite very little compassion at the cottage doors.

Winter was always a prosperous begging season, owing mostly to the wretched appearance of the half-naked children. Obviously, then, Jockie and Gib must divide the spoil with the other young members of the tribe. The neat, warm garments were hidden in a very artistic manner under some very ragged ones, and in a short time the children to all appearance had reverted to their former state of cold and filth.

This done, they received their instructions; they were to go off together to the village and tell at every cottage the story of their little brother born in the storm. At each door they were to beg for food for their mother and for themselves. Begging, however, was such second nature to the boys that they scarcely needed these instructions.

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The pearl orgy went on for three days. At the end of that time the men had perforce to stop drinking because not a penny was left in their ragged pockets. They would fain have drunk more, but were not even men enough to earn money for another carousal.

Mary Reid in the meantime had been leading her luxurious invalid life at the Glen Farm, attended to by Mrs. Macpherson.

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During these long days of effortless comfort, the poor soul had a sort of slow revelation vouchsafed to her. It was purely material in its origin, but a revelation none the less. An obscure feeling arose somewhere within her that, given assured food and shelter, life would become a different matter altogether.

The educated mind can scarcely grasp, even by the utmost stretch of imagination, what the mental condition of a creature like Mary Reid really is. Consider that for centuries no ray of education has pierced the darkness of ignorance in which the tinkers live. There are no such savages in our Islands, for they observe no religious customs and are "a law unto themselves" in the fullest sense of the expression. Constant exposure to wind and weather has given to their bodies almost the hardihood of animals, but the only direction in which their intelligence develops is that of self-interest. How to beg or pilfer enough of food for each day is their one preoccupation; and when the difficulty of doing this in lonely country-places is taken into consideration, the amount of pilfering is very small indeed. They seldom steal in real earnest; for there seems to be a distinction somewhere in their minds between taking a turnip or two from the fields, or lifting a few potatoes, and actually stealing articles from houses.

So the tinkers are not unpopular with the country-people. They are regarded as a nuisance, but not as a danger, and are seldom grudged something at each door they come to.

It was, then, wholly through the avenues of sense that Mary Reid began to think after a dim, confused

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fashion. She felt warm and rested and comfortable for about the first time in her life. Abundance of food was hers for the asking; she suddenly found herself questioning what life would be like if one were always warm, comfortable, and well fed? Then another quite distinct idea came to her as she lay there in the pleasant gloom of the byre and held the little tinker to her heart. After all, why should he not live this life of splendid ease, instead of the wild and miserable life of his race? Mary knew that her own fate was sealed for ever—a tinker she was, and a tinker she must remain; but why should this child not escape into the happy world that she was getting a glimpse of?

For it appeared that Miss Nellie had really been in earnest when she offered to adopt the boy. Since that first morning, she had walked to the farm every day to repeat her offer and press its advantages upon Mary.

"See what a fine baby he is! Give him to me and I'll make a fine man of him too!" she told the mother each time. "I'll educate him and send him out to Canada, and he'll have a house and land of his own before he's twenty. Isn't that better than growing up to be like Richard and Rab—starving when they're not drunk, and drunk when they're not starving?"

It was not Miss Nellie's habit to mince matters, as you see by this rather rude speech; the only concession she made to politeness was that she did not include Jock, Mary's husband, in her indictment of tinker manhood. But Mary knew quite well that Jock was as drunken and idle as his brothers, though

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Miss Nellie had not mentioned him by name.

She always replied meekly, "Aye, my leddy, it's truth ye're sayin', sure's deith!"

Then Miss Nellie would tell her wonderful tales of Canada, the land of plenty, and contrast these with the wretched life of hunger and cold that Mary and her people led. Continual dropping wears away stones; every day Mary opposed the scheme less, till Miss Nellie became almost certain of gaining her point. Then bright dreams of the little tinker's future began to float before Mary's eyes. In imagination she saw him a grown man, rich and powerful. . . .

Curiously enough she had no ambitions for Jockie and Gib; they seemed to belong so inevitably to the old order that it never occurred to her to imagine them in other conditions. But the baby was different; perhaps, because he had nearly cost her her life, she already prized him far above his brethren.

The other Reid women came in due time to see Mary and inspect her new-born son. They brought the news of the drinking bout (which Mary received with entire unconcern), and in their turn were told the tidings of Miss Nellie's scheme for adopting the child.

Here indeed was subject for discussion round the camp fire. That Mary was supremely lucky was of course their first verdict. They each had young babies, and had to trudge along carrying them on their backs mile after mile every day. Mary would be absolved from this duty. Further, Miss Nellie had made another dazzling offer; she would board and lodge Mary till the baby was old enough to do

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without maternal sustenance—it would not be fair to the child to separate him from his mother. There was luck indeed! No wonder Mary wanted to accept such a chance when it came her way. Two difficulties had to be reckoned with, however—Jockie and Gib, and Jockie's and Gib's father. Miss Nellie with all her philanthropy had not extended her invitation to the children; but this obstacle was not very hard to surmount. They must just be added to the other families, get a crust and a bone and a drop of tea with the rest of them, and be none the worse for a little neglect. Nor would the separation be at all heart-breaking. The Reids were always "on the road", going and coming through that bit of country a dozen times in the year; Mary would see her children often enough. As for her man, Mary, with artless cynicism, hinted to the philanthropist that a little money would easily settle his objections; he could have another spree, as long as the one he was just recovering from.

"The downhill path is easy," the poet tells us. Mary Reid had only had four days of luxury, yet already she had set her heart upon spending the whole winter in comfort.

The very thought of resuming her usual mode of life sent a shiver down her relaxed spine.

The little tinker was wakening to his fifth morning in the world, when a slow procession came winding up the long hill road that leads to the Glen Farm.

All the Reids; Richard carrying the tent sticks; Rab slouching along, his dilapidated pipes under his arm; Jock the tinsmith with the instruments of his

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trade. Their wives were heavily burdened; for each had a baby tied upon her back, and carried, moreover, a load of tin cans, "nawken's chaeterie", as they called them, for sale on the road. The older children followed at their own sweet will, the younger ones packed into the donkey-cart which in general ended the procession. But this morning the Reid forces seemed to have been augmented; for a second little cart, led by two more men, came after the other.

Jockie and Gib scoured ahead to the farm and burst into the byre to impart a great bit of news to their mother.

"Grannie's on the road, Mither!" they screamed; and again, "Grannie's on the road! She's oot-bye!"

At the sound of these words Mary sat up upon her elbow, as if the news startled her. An expression very like fear crossed her face. She hugged the little tinker closer against her side.

Looking out from the darkness of the byre into the morning light she could see the whole procession of men and women framed like a picture by the doorway, as they came trailing towards the farm. When they reached the gate the procession halted, and two of the men lifted out of the second donkey-cart the strangest object imaginable.

Seated in a large creel of plaited willows, much in the attitude of a Buddha, was an old woman. So old she was that Time seemed to have done with her—had given her up apparently as a bad job, and decided to let her choose her own date for death. Not a tooth was left in her head, and her hands were shrivelled away till they resembled the claws of some ancient bird. All appearance of life had long ago left the

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flesh of her face—it was exactly like that of a mummy; but deep in their sockets her bright blue eyes flashed with a strange vindictive gleam like the eyes of a ferret.

This weird relic of humanity had indeed trodden the earth for the extraordinary period of a hundred and four years. The tribe held her sacred, they obeyed her every nod, would almost have worshipped her, and trembled before her displeasure, for she was believed to have uncanny powers. A glance of those terrible old blue eyes could, it was thought, "owerlook" anyone who displeased her. She had never slept under a roof in all her hundred years. On the ground she had lain, and would lie till that time, surely not to be long delayed now, when it would be her bed for ever. Of all the sons and daughters she had borne, not one now survived. Long years ago she had seen her children's children die—yet here she was still. There is something that chills the blood in such permanence of the impermanent. It seems to shut out the survivor from the great human family whose members are linked together by the common tie of mortality.

This old woman was a tremendous asset to the Reid tribe, for her uncanny appearance and almost fabulous age made the country-people hold her in great awe. There was not a farmer's or shepherd's wife in the district who would have dared to refuse Grannie Reid an alms. She had been "on the road" so long before their day—so long before their father's or grandfather's day! At the Glen Farm, where Macphersons had lived for three generations, they had a tradition that the present Macpherson's

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grandfather remembered Grannie a hearty woman in his boyhood.

At some far-off date in their tribal history, the Reids had divided into two bands. One migrated to Argyllshire, while the other remained in the old Perthshire haunts. Then a fierce dispute arose between them for the possession of Grannie. Long and heated was the contest, till at last they came to a compromise; she was to be a joint possession, sometimes in charge of one branch of the family, sometimes of the other. They did not pretend to love her; but they feared her exceedingly, and there was abundance in the camp when Grannie was with them.

The old creature was despotic to a degree. She migrated from district to district, from county to county, as the fancy took her, seated in her creel in the little cuddy-cart and waited on with servility by her many descendants. In this way she made dramatic appearances from time to time among her kindred. Suddenly, perhaps, as they crouched round the camp fire late at night, the rattle of the cuddy-cart would sound, and in the cart was the creel with the dread little figure of Grannie squatting in it as upright as if she were carved out of stone. . . . Then came a stir among them all, for Grannie demanded the best of everything—the most sheltered corner of the ragged tent, the tastiest bone to pick.

The children fled before the old woman in terror, disappearing at sight of her as rabbits whisk into their holes at sight of a dog.

The day after her arrival in a place, Grannie would set off to “work” the neighbourhood. Her methods were very simple, but quite effective.

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The cart stopped at the door of the house she desired to visit, and the two Reids who were deputed to carry the creel of the old despot lifted it out of the cart. They never knocked at any door, simply lifted the latch and walked into the house. There they deposited Grannie's creel, right in the middle of the floor; and there she sat, glinting out of her wicked old eyes at the frightened women and children who hastened to do her bidding. Tea, tobacco, potatoes, old clothes she would demand—and she generally got whatever she asked. Her bearers in the meantime stood by the door, waiting the signal to lift the creel and carry it out again. Thus the old creature went on from house to house, in a kind of royal progress, till she had extracted as much as she required in the way of food and clothing.

But this morning Grannie Reid had not come upon a begging expedition to the Glen Farm—she had come in quest of her erring great-great-granddaughter-in-law. For, on arrival at the camp the night before, Grannie had been met by the news of the little tinker's birth and the rumour of his proposed adoption. Here indeed was matter for prompt interference.

Having discovered where Mary was housed, Grannie directed the bearers to carry the creel into the byre, that she might come face to face with the culprit. At sight of her ancient relative Mary sat up on her bracken couch, clasping the baby tightly in her arms, but spoke not a word. There was an oppressive silence for a minute; then the vials of Grannie's wrath were poured out:

"Sae it's a fine leddy we've got here!" she said

with biting sarcasm,—“a braw leddy!—maybe ye’ll spare an auld body a puckle tea, mem?—me that’s been sleepin’ out-bye a’ this coorse weather, an’ you sae warm and dry?”

Mary winced, but was not quick-witted enough to find any retort to make. She kept silence, rocking the child in her arms and pretending to be very busy with him.

“D’ye no’ think shame tae be lying there an’ the bairn fower days auld?” the old woman asked next, in a contemptuous tone; and at this taunt poor Mary faltered out the tale of her illness and sufferings in the storm. But it did not touch Grannie one whit. She only despised Mary from the bottom of her heart, and thought her a hopeless degenerate.

“An’ ye’re tae mak’ a gadgie (house-dweller) o’ the bairn, they’re tellin’ me!” she said. “He’ll be as fine as yersel, then!”

“Weel, Grannie, the leddy says she’ll gie him schoolin’ an’ mak’ a braw man o’ him, an’ he’ll hae siller o’ his ain afore he’s twenty,” Mary pled.

“Schoolin’!” the old woman screamed—“Schoolin’!—wha wants schoolin’? ‘A pretty like nawken (tinker) he’ll be wi’ schoolin’! Did ever ye hear tell o’ a nawken could read or write?”

Then Mary, with sudden injudicious frankness, expressed her secret.

“Eh! but I’m no’ wantin’ the laddie to be a nawken. It’s a gey hard life, Grannie.”

Here was open rebellion against the established order of things; and having once uttered her rebel thought, Mary faced the old tyrant bravely, laying before her all Miss Nellie’s schemes for the future of

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the child. No homeless wanderer was her little tinker to be in years to come, but a rich man with house and land of his own somewhere across the sea ("t'ither Watches," as Mary expressed it in tinker talk). In this wonderful country men could always make gold, and her son would found there a new race of Reids richer and happier than his fathers.

All this poor Mary expressed, oh! so falteringly and haltingly; for she was afraid of Grannie, not very sure of the scheme herself, but anxious, somewhere in the depths of her darkly ignorant mind, to do something for the child. She had, however, to reckon with one of the most immovable things in human nature—the intense conservatism of extreme old age. For, like a pool of water slowly congealing on a bitter night, the heart of man is apt to contract, with the passing of time, into a terrible immobility.

When, exhausted by her eloquence, Mary sank back against the pillow, the old woman burst out into a torrent of bitter protest.

Her tinker talk, framed partly of Scotch dialect, partly of cant words, would need a philologist to do it full justice.

"A braw bodachan (man) ye'll mak' o' the bairn gin ye gie him ower tae gadgies!" she cried; and then she came to the gist of the argument—her deep contempt for these same "gadgies"—this whole race of pitiful house-dwellers. They were afraid of everything; afraid of cold and heat; of wind and rain; of hunger and thirst. Was there a gadgie among them who would dare to sleep on the lennam (ground) on a winter night? She sat there, this strange survival, and discoursed on the supreme advantages of the

tinker mode of life as compared with that of the house-dweller, much as an ancient oak tree endowed with speech might discourse to the saplings of the wood upon the restrictions of a hot-house existence.

"Hae I no' had my health a' my hunner years?" she asked triumphantly; "an' did ever I sleep in a wuddrus (bed)? There wasna ane o' my bairns born in a keir (house), an' I had twal' o' them. . . ." She paused, searching back in the recesses of memory. Scenes a-many of birth and of death alike surged up from the past and moved before her mind's eye. Munching her toothless jaws as if she chewed something tangible in these memories, the old woman sat in silence for a minute, then recommenced her tale:

"Aye! . . . twal . . . eicht sons an' fower dachters . . . an' a' in the grave lang, lang syne! . . ."

She paused to ruminate again, before she added, "But mind, the nawken manishies (tinker women) hae their weans easier: thae gadgie wives make an unco' work aboot haein' a bairn. Mony's the time I've seen me tak' the road again wi' my bairn on my back an' it no' twa oors auld. . . ." At this hardy reminiscence Mary winced again, ashamed of her own softness. This was exactly what Grannie desired; she watched the effect of her words, and then went on to impress her lesson if possible more deeply:

"The same wi' deith—*they get awa' easier*. Ye'll no' mind my son Richard—ech! no—he was deid fifty year syne. . . . Weel, Richard had a hoast, syne a doctor body doon Aberfeldy way cam' rooned by the wattles (tents) an' said it was sinfu' keepin' a

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deein' man oot-bye in the cauld. Syne they pit him intil a granzie (barn), puir man. . . . A sair time he had o't—he *couldna get awa'.*"

The old woman paused significantly, then nodded her little withered head, and smiled a cunning, cunning smile. "But I helpit the puir lad: '*Bing Avree, Richard*' (come away, Richard), says I intil his lug; '*D'ye no jan it's morgan?*' (Do you not know it's morning?), an' wi' that he up an' oot frae the granzie . . . a shuker rattie it was (a clear moonlight night it was). I laid him doon oot-bye on the lennam, an' he hadna ta'en three breiths o' the caller air afore he got awa'. . . ."

Mary gasped at this horrible reminiscence and hugged the baby to her heart, much as the father in the song clasps his son when the Erl-King whispers in his ear: could it be that she would ever thus wish to hasten the departure of the little creature whom she had endowed with life? She did not, of course, express the thought in these grandiloquent words; but it darted through her mind in some sort of form, and she shuddered.

"Aweel, Mary," the old woman said, "tak yer way o't—mak' a gadgie o' the bairn if ye please—it's truth I've telt t'ye."

With these parting words, the old woman beckoned to the lads who had carried her in. At her signal they slouched forward and lifted the creel again. Mary was forced to speak.

"Are ye for the road then, Grannie?" she asked timidly.

"*Syet*" ("Yes"), Grannie answered laconically, without even turning her head in Mary's direction.

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"Ye've no' seen the bairn," Mary cried, distress in her voice.

"Ugh! I'm no' carin' for gadgie bairns," the old woman retorted—she would not evince the slightest interest in this unworthy offshoot of the tribe. Her bearers hoisted the creel between them and started for the road again. Mary gazed after their retreating figures as they marched across the yard and through the gate, carrying their curious burden.

Down on the road below the farm the whole good-for-nothing cavalcade of the Reids was to be seen, halted by the dyke-side. The very air reeked of them; an indescribable rank smell of wood-smoke, old rags, and filth. Mary's husband was there, but he did not even trouble to saunter up to the farm to see his new-born son.

As Mary gazed out at her tribe she gave a deep sigh; "Aweel!" she said aloud to herself, and again, "Aweel!" as if she were renouncing something. A few minutes later the cavalcade moved on. Jockie and Gib, however, rushed up to the byre with a parting message to their mother:

"Faither says 'ye may gie the bairn tae the led dy for a rij (a sovereign) an' we're aff Aberfeldy wye.'"

Having delivered this fond paternal message, the children darted off to the farm to beg a last scone from Mrs. Macpherson before they "took the road."

Here was a dilemma for poor Mary—her husband evidently wanted his money, and yet Grannie was bitterly opposed to the idea of the child's adoption. Mary knew well enough that she, not Jock, would get the blame and would come under Grannie's ban. Grannie seldom found fault with the men—they were

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sacred in her eyes; she reserved all her wrath for their unfortunate wives. If Jock was "angered" by not getting the money as he expected, he would probably beat her; but Mary had often been beaten. She could face the thought of that better than the fear of Grannie's tongue, and (oh, horrible over-mastering terror!)—the idea that she and the child might be "overlooked" by the old woman. Mary was not accustomed to doing much thinking; to and fro in the darkness of her untutored mind she tumbled the arguments for and against the scheme till she was confused and weary. She would give the child to the lady—she would not give him; Jock wanted the money—Grannie would be "angered"; she herself wanted to keep the child—yet equally she wanted him to be given this wonderful chance that had come his way so unexpectedly. There seemed no light anywhere on the path. . . .

In the evening when Mrs. Macpherson came into the byre she thought that her patient was very restless.

"What ails ye, Mary? Are ye not feelin' so well?" she asked kindly.

Mary only shook her head.

"Ye'll soon be getting up," Mrs. Macpherson went on, anxious to cheer her; "you're that strong and healthy, it's wonderfu'."

"Aye," Mary assented, and added with a sort of shy impulsiveness, "Ye've been gey kind, mistress."

"I'd do as much for any sick pairson," said Mrs. Macpherson; she had a touch of self-righteousness in her nature which made it a great pleasure to her to make this pious announcement. Certain texts of

Scripture crossed her memory at this moment, and gave her a feeling of virtuous satisfaction; "*Do good unto all men,*" she found herself quoting, and then was pulled up by the remainder of the text, "*especially unto those that are of the household of faith.*" She could not in the wildest way connect poor Mary with the household of faith; so she was robbed of any satisfaction in that text, and had to fall back upon some of the other exhortations to good works which seemed more applicable.

"Well, good night to ye, Mary," she said. "If ye get a good sleep ye'll be all right the morn."

"Aye, mistress, I'll be fine," Mary replied.

The next morning, just as day broke in the east, Mary rose from her bracken bed and opened a chink of the byre door. The bitter wind blew in, but she did not seem to notice it. She looked across to the farm windows. No light shone there yet, and there was no sound anywhere except the whistling wind as it blew round the corners of the house.

Mary shut the door again, and felt her way back to the bed. On the box beside it Mrs. Macpherson had put a candle and a box of matches—not without misgivings lest Mary should burn down the byre some night. Great admonitions had been given her on the subject, so that she scarcely dared to light the candle. But this morning it was lighted, and by its feeble guttering flame Mary began to dress. All her poor garments had been dried for her, and they lay beside the bed. One by one she put them on, slowly, almost regretfully it seemed. She then flung her old green tartan shawl over her shoulders and in its folds she deposited the little tinker. With a sigh she stood

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and looked round the barn. . . . So might a king renounce his kingdom.

Last of all, Mary lifted the great bundle of tin cans she had carried on the night of her arrival, and swung them over her arm. She was ready for the road once more.

Then, as if a sudden thought had struck her, she stopped and detached a large tin pail from the bundle. It was all she could offer to Mrs. Macpherson in recognition of her kindness.

She laid it on the doorstone of the byre where it must be found, then turned away resolutely and trudged off through the darkness with her long, swinging step. The little tinker did not like the cold wind; he buried his tiny head deep in the folds of the tartan shawl and gave a shrill whimpering cry.

He seemed to be entering a protest against this decision which pledged him for ever to the life of his fathers.

BY
JOHN BUCHAN



THE OUTGOING OF THE TIDE¹

Between the hours of twelve and one, even at the turning of the tide.

THEN COME from distant parts to admire the tides of Solloway, which race in at flood and retreat at ebb with a greater speed than a horse can follow. But nowhere are there queerer waters than in our own parish of Caulds at the place called the Sker Bay, where between two horns of land a shallow estuary receives the stream of the Sker. I never daunter by its shores, and see the waters hurrying like messengers from the great deep, without solemn thoughts and a memory of Scripture words on the terror of the sea. The vast Atlantic may be fearful in its wrath, but with us it is no clean open rage, but the deceit of the creature, the unholy ways of quicksands when the waters are gone, and their stealthy return like a thief in the night-watches. But in the times of which I write there were more awful fears than any from the violence of nature. It was before the day of my ministry in Caulds, for then I was a bit callant in short clothes in my native parish of Lesmahagow;

¹ From the unpublished Remains of the Reverend John Dennistoun, sometime minister of the Gospel in the parish of Caulds, and author of *Satan's Artifices against the Elect*.

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but the worthy Doctor Chrystal, who had charge of spiritual things, has told me often of the power of Satan and his emissaries in that lonely place. It was the day of warlocks and apparitions, now happily driven out by the zeal of the General Assembly. Witches pursued their wanchancy calling, bairns were spirited away, young lassies sold their souls to the evil one, and the Accuser of the Brethren in the shape of a black tyke was seen about cottage-doors in the gloaming. Many and earnest were the prayers of good Doctor Chrystal, but the evil thing, in spite of his wrestling, grew and flourished in his midst. The parish stank of idolatry, abominable rites were practised in secret, and in all the bounds there was no one had a more evil name for this black traffic than one Alison Sempill, who bode at the Skerburn-foot.

The cottage stood nigh the burn in a little garden with lilyoaks and grosart-bushes lining the pathway. The Sker ran by in a linn among hollins, and the noise of its waters was ever about the place. The highroad on the other side was frequented by few, for a nearer-hand way to the west had been made through the Lowe Moss. Sometimes a herd from the hills would pass by with sheep, sometimes a tinkler or a wandering merchant, and once in a long while the laird of Heriotside on his grey horse riding to Gledsmuir. And they who passed would see Alison hirpling in her garden, speaking to herself like the ill-wife she was, or sitting on a cutty-stool by the door-side with her eyes on other than mortal sights. Where she came from no man could tell. There were some said she was no woman, but a ghost haunting some

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mortal tenement. Others would threep she was gentrice, come of a persecuting family in the west, that had been ruined in the Revolution wars. She never seemed to want for siller; the house was as bright as a new preen, the yaird better delved than the manse garden; and there was routh of fowls and doos about the small steading, forbye a wheen sheep and milk-kye in the fields. No man ever saw Alison at any market in the countryside, and yet the Skerburnfoot was plenished yearly in all proper order. One man only worked on the place, a doited lad who had long been a charge to the parish, and who had not the sense to fear danger or the wit to understand it. Upon all others the sight of Alison, were it but for a moment, cast a cold grue, not to be remembered without terror. It seems she was not ordinarily ill-faured, as men use the word. She was maybe sixty years in age, small and trig, with her grey hair folded neatly under her mutch. But the sight of her eyes was not a thing to forget. John Dodds said they were the een of a deer with the devil ahint them, and indeed they would so appal an onlooker that a sudden unreasoning terror came into his heart, while his feet would impel him to flight. Once John, being overtaken in drink on the roadside by the cottage, and dreaming that he was burning in hell, woke and saw the old wife hobbling towards him. Thereupon he fled soberly to the hills, and from that day became a quiet-living humble-minded Christian. She moved about the country like a wraith, gathering herbs in dark loanings, lingering in kirkyairds, and casting a blight on innocent bairns. Once Robert Smillie found her in a ruinous kirk on the Lang Muir where

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of old the idolatrous rites of Rome were practised. It was a hot day, and in the quiet place the flies buzzed in crowds, and he noted that she sat clothed in them as with a garment, yet suffering no discomfort. Then he, having mind of Beelzebub, the god of flies, fled without a halt homewards; but, falling in the Coo's Loan, broke two ribs and a collar-bone, the whilk misfortune was much blessed to his soul. And there were darker tales in the countryside, of weans stolen, of lassies misguided, of innocent beasts cruelly tortured, and in one and all there came in the name of the wife of the Skerburnfoot. It was noted by them that kenned best that her cantrips were at their worst when the tides in the Sker Bay ebbed between the hours of twelve and one. At this season of the night the tides of mortality run lowest, and when the outgoing of those unco waters fell in with the setting of the current of life, then indeed was the hour for unholy revels. While honest men slept in their beds, the auld rudas carlines took their pleasure. That there is a delight in sin no man denies, but to most it is but a broken glint in the pauses of their conscience. But what must be the hellish joy of those lost beings who have forsworn God and trysted with the Prince of Darkness, it is not for a Christian to say. Certain it is that it must be great, though their master waits at the end of the road to claim the wizened things they call their souls. Serious men, notably Gidden Scott in the Back of the Hill and Simon Wauch in the sheiling of Chasehope, have seen Alison wandering on the wet sands, dancing to no earthly music, while the heavens, they said, were full of lights and sounds which betokened the presence

of the prince of the powers of the air. It was a season of heart-searching for God's saints in Caulds, and the dispensation was blessed to not a few.

It will seem strange that in all this time the presbytery was idle, and no effort was made to rid the place of so fell an influence. But there was a reason, and the reason, as in most like cases, was a lassie. Forbye Alison there lived at the Skerburnfoot a young maid, Ailie Sempill, who by all accounts was as good and bonnie as the other was evil. She passed for a daughter of Alison's, whether born in wedlock or not I cannot tell; but there were some said she was no kin to the auld witch-wife, but some bairn spirited away from honest parents. She was young and blithe, with a face like an April morning and a voice in her that put the laverocks to shame. When she sang in the kirk folk have told me that they had a foretaste of the music of the New Jerusalem, and when she came in by the village of Caulds old men stottered to their doors to look at her. Moreover, from her earliest days the bairn had some glimmerings of grace. Though no minister would visit the Skerburnfoot, or if he went, departed quicker than he came, the girl Ailie attended regular at the catechising at the Mains of Sker. It may be that Alison thought she would be a better offering for the devil if she were given the chance of forswearing God, or it may be that she was so occupied in her own dark business that she had no care of the bairn. Meanwhile the lass grew up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I have heard Doctor Chrystal say that he never had a communicant more full of the things of the Spirit. From the day when she first declared her wish to come forward

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to the hour when she broke bread at the table, she walked like one in a dream. The lads of the parish might cast admiring eyes on her bright cheeks and yellow hair as she sat in her white gown in the kirk, but well they knew she was not for them. To be the bride of Christ was the thought that filled her heart; and when at the fencing of the tables Doctor Chrystal preached from Matthew nine and fifteen, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" it was remarked by sundry that Ailie's face was liker the countenance of an angel than of a mortal lass.

It is with the day of her first communion that this narrative of mine begins. As she walked home after the morning table she communed in secret and her heart sang within her. She had mind of God's mercies in the past, how He had kept her feet from the snares of evil-doers which had been spread around her youth. She had been told unholy charms like the seven south streams and the nine rowan berries, and it was noted when she went first to the catechising that she prayed "Our Father which wert in heaven," the prayer which the ill-wife Alison had taught her, meaning by it Lucifer who had been in heaven and had been cast out therefrom. But when she had come to years of discretion she had freely chosen the better part, and evil had ever been repelled from her soul like Gled water from the stones of Gled brig. Now she was in a rapture of holy content. The drucken bell—for the ungodly fashion lingered in Caulds—was ringing in her ears as she left the village, but to her it was but a kirk-bell and a goodly sound. As she went through the woods where the primroses and the

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whitethorn were blossoming, the place seemed as the land of Elam, wherein there were twelve wells and three-score and ten palm trees. And then, as it might be, another thought came into her head, for it is ordained that frail mortality cannot long continue in holy joy. In the kirk she had been only the bride of Christ; but as she came through the wood, with the birds lilting and the winds of the world blowing, she had mind of another lover. For this lass, though so cold to men, had not escaped the common fate. It seemed that the young Heriotside, riding by one day, stopped to speir something or other, and got a glisk of Ailie's face, which caught his fancy. He passed the road again many times, and then he would meet her in the gloaming or of a morning in the field as she went to fetch the kye. "Blue are the hills that are far away" is an owercome in the countryside, and while at first on his side it may have been but a young man's fancy, to her he was like the god Apollo descending from the skies. He was good to look on, brawly dressed, and with a tongue in his head that would have wiled the bird from the tree. Moreover, he was of gentle kin, and she was a poor lass biding in a cot-house with an ill-reputed mother. It seems that in time the young man, who had begun the affair with no good intentions, fell honestly in love, while she went singing about the doors as innocent as a bairn, thinking of him when her thoughts were not on higher things. So it came about that long ere Ailie reached home it was on young Heriotside that her mind dwelt, and it was the love of him that made her eyes glow and her cheeks redden.

Now it chanced that at that very hour her master

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had been with Alison, and the pair of them were preparing a deadly pit. Let no man say that the devil is not a cruel tyrant. He may give his folk some scrapings of unhallowed pleasure; but he will exact tithes, yea of anise and cummin, in return, and there is aye the reckoning to pay at the hinder end. It seems that now he was driving Alison hard. She had been remiss of late, fewer souls sent to hell, less zeal in quenching the Spirit, and above all the crowning offence that her bairn had communicated in Christ's kirk. She had waited overlong, and now it was like that. Ailie would escape her toils. I have no skill of fancy to tell of that dark colloque, but the upshot was that Alison swore by her lost soul and the pride of sin to bring the lass into thrall to her master. The fiend had bare departed when Ailie came over the threshold to find the auld carline glunching by the fire.

It was plain she was in the worst of tempers. She flyted on the lass till the poor thing's cheek paled. "There you gang," she cried, "troking wi' thae wearifu' Pharisees o' Caulds, whae daurna darken your mither's door. A bonnie dutiful child, quotha! Wumman, hae ye nae pride?—no even the mense o' a tinkler-lass?" And then she changed her voice, and would be as soft as honey. 'My puir wee Ailie! was I thrawn till ye? Never mind, my bonnie. You and me are a' that's left, and we maunna be ill to ither.'" And then the two had their dinner, and all the while the auld wife was crooning over the lass. "We maun 'gree weel," she says, "for we're like to be our leelane for the rest o' our days: They tell me Heriotside is seeking Joan o' the Croft, and they're sune to be cried in Gledsmuir kirk."

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It was the first the lass had heard of it, and you may fancy she was struck dumb. And so with one thing and another the auld witch raised the fiends of jealousy in that innocent heart. She would cry out that Heriotside was an ill-doing wastrel, and had no business to come and flatter honest lasses. And then she would speak of his gentle birth and his leddy mother, and say it was indeed presumption to hope that so great a gentleman could mean all that he said. Before long Ailie was silent and white, while her mother rimed on about men and their ways. And then she could thole it no longer, but must go out and walk by the burn to cool her hot brow and calm her thoughts, while the witch indoors laughed to herself at her devices.

For days Ailie had an absent eye and a sad face, and it so fell out that in all that time young Heriotside, who had scarce missed a day, was laid up with a broken arm and never came near her. So in a week's time she was beginning to hearken to her mother when she spoke of incantations and charms for restoring love. She kenned it was sin; but though not seven days syne she had sat at the Lord's table, so strong is love in a young heart that she was on the very brink of it. But the grace of God was stronger than her weak will. She would have none of her mother's runes and philters, though her soul cried out for them. Always when she was most disposed to listen some merciful power stayed her consent. Alison grew thrawner as the hours passed. She kenned of Heriotside's broken arm, and she feared that any day he might recover and put her strata-gems to shame. And then it seems that she colloqued

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with her master and heard word of a subtler device. For it was approaching that uncanny time of year, the festival of Beltane, when the auld pagans were wont to sacrifice to their god Baal. In this season warlocks and carlines have a special dispensation to do evil, and Alison waited on its coming with graceless joy. As it happened, the tides in the Sker Bay ebbed at this time between the hours of twelve and one, and, as I have said, this was the hour above all others when the powers of darkness were most potent. Would the lass but consent to go abroad in the unhallowed place at this awful season and hour of the night, she was as firmly handfasted to the devil as if she had signed a bond with her own blood. For then, it seemed, the forces of good fled far away, the world for one hour was given over to its ancient prince, and the man or woman who willingly sought the spot was his bond-servant for ever. There are deadly sins from which God's people may recover. A man may even communicate unworthily, and yet, so be it he sin not against the Holy Ghost, he may find forgiveness. But it seems that for this Beltane sin there could be no pardon, and I can testify from my own knowledge that they who once committed it became lost souls from that day. James Deuchar, once a promising professor, fell thus out of sinful bravery and died blaspheming; and of Kate Mallison, who went the same road, no man can tell. Here, indeed, was the witch-wife's chance, and she was the more keen, for her master had warned her that this was her last. Either Ailie's soul would be his, or her auld wrinkled body and black heart would be flung from this pleasant world to their apportioned place.

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Some days later it happened that young Heriotside was stepping home over the Lang Muir about ten at night—it being his first jaunt from home since his arm had mended. He had been to the supper of the Forest Club at the Cross Keys in Gledsmuir, a clam-jamfry of wild young blades who passed the wine and played at cartes once a-fortnight. It seems he had drunk well, so that the world ran round about and he was in the best of tempers. The moon came down and bowed to him, and he took off his hat to it. For every step he travelled miles, so that in a little he was beyond Scotland altogether and pacing the Arabian desert. He thought he was the Pope of Rome, so he held out his foot to be kissed, and rolled twenty yards to the bottom of a small brae. Syne he was the King of France, and fought hard with a whin-bush till he had banged it to pieces. After that nothing would content him but he must be a bogle, for he found his head dunting on the stars and his legs were knocking the hills together. He thought of the mischief he was doing to the auld earth, and sat down and cried at his wickedness. Then he went on, and maybe the steep road to the Moss Rig helped him, for he began to get soberer and ken his whereabouts.

On a sudden he was aware of a man linking along at his side. He cried, "A fine night," and the man replied. Syne, being merry from his cups, he tried to slap him on the back. The next he kenned he was rolling on the grass, for his hand had gone clean through the body and found nothing but air.

His head was so thick with wine that he found nothing droll in this. "Faith, friend," he says, "that was a nasty fall for a fellow that has supped

weel. Where might your road be gaun to?"

"To the World's End," said the man; "but I stop at the Skerburnfoot."

"Bide the night at Heriotside," says he. "It's a thought out of your way, but it's a comfortable bit."

"There's mair comfort at the Skerburnfoot," said the dark man.

Now the mention of the Skerburnfoot brought back to him only the thought of Ailie and not of the witch-wife, her mother. So he jaloused no ill, for at the best he was slow in the uptake.

The two of them went on together for a while, Heriotside's fool head filled with the thought of the lass. Then the dark man broke silence. "Ye're thinkin' o' the maid Ailie Sempill," says he.

"How ken ye that?" asked Heriotside.

"It is my business to read the herts o' men," said the other.

"And who may ye be?" said Heriotside, growing eerie.

"Just an auld packman," said he—"nae name ye wad ken, but kin to mony gentle houses."

"And what about Ailie, you that ken sae muckle?" asked the young man.

"Naething," was the answer—"naething that concerns you, for ye'll never get the lass."

"By God, and I will!" says Heriotside, for he was a profane swearer.

"That's the wrong name to seek her in, anyway," said the man.

At this the young laird struck a great blow at him with his stick, but found nothing to resist him but the hill-wind.

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When they had gone on a bit the dark man spoke again. "The lassie is thirled to holy things," says he. "She has nae care for flesh and blood, only for devout contemplation."

"She loves me," says Heriotside.

"Not you," says the other, "but a shadow in your stead."

At this the young man's heart began to tremble, for it seemed that there was truth in what his companion said, and he was ower drunk to think gravely.

"I kenna whatna man ye are," he says, "but ye have the skill of lassies' hearts. Tell me truly, is there no way to win her to common love?"

"One way there is," said the man, "and for our friendship's sake I will tell it you. If ye can ever tryst wi' her on Beltane's Eve on the Sker sands, at the green link o' the burn where the sands begin, on the ebb o' the tide when the midnight is bye but afore cock-crow, she'll be yours, body and soul, for this world and for ever."

And then it appeared to the young man that he was walking his lone up the grass walk of Heriotside with the house close by him. He thought no more of the stranger he had met, but the word stuck in his heart.

It seems that about this very time Alison was telling the same tale to poor Ailie. She cast up to her every idle gossip she could think of. "It's Joan o' the Croft," was aye her owercome, and she would threep that they were to be cried in kirk on the first Sabbath of June. And then she would rime on about the black cruelty of it, and cry down curses on the lover, so that her daughter's heart grew cauld with fear. It is terrible to think of the power of the

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world even in a redeemed soul. Here was a maid who had drunk of the well of grace and tasted of God's mercies, and yet there were moments when she was ready to renounce her hope. At those awful seasons God seemed far off and the world very nigh, and to sell her soul for love looked a fair bargain. At other times she would resist the devil and comfort herself with prayer; but aye when she woke there was the sore heart, and when she went to sleep there were the weary eyes. There was no comfort in the goodliness of spring or the bright sunshine weather, and she who had been wont to go about the doors light-foot and blithe was now as dowie as a widow woman.

And then one afternoon in the hinder end of April came young Heriotside riding to the Skerburnfoot. His arm was healed, he had got him a fine new suit of green, and his horse was a mettle beast that well set off his figure. Ailie was standing by the doorstep as he came down the road, and her heart stood still with joy. But a second thought gave her anguish. This man, so gallant and braw, would never be for her; doubtless the fine suit and the capering horse were for Joan of the Croft's pleasure. And he in turn, when he remarked her wan cheek and dowie eyes, had mind of what the dark man said on the muir, and saw in her a maid sworn to no mortal love. Yet the passion for her had grown fiercer than ever, and he swore to himself that he would win her back from her phantasies. She, one may believe, was ready enough to listen. As she walked with him by the Sker water his words were like music to her ears, and Alison within-doors laughed to herself and saw her devices prosper.

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He spoke to her of love and his own heart, and the girl hearkened gladly. Syne he rebuked her coldness and cast scorn upon her piety, and so far was she beguiled that she had no answer. Then from one thing and another he spoke of some true token of their love. He said he was jealous, and craved something to ease his care. "It's but a small thing I ask," says he; "but it will make me a happy man, and nothing ever shall come atween us. Tryst wi' me for Beltane's Eve on the Sker sands, at the green link o' the burn where the sands begin, on the ebb o' the tide when midnight is bye but afore cock-crow. For," said he, "that was our forebears' tryst for true lovers, and wherefore no for you and me?"

The lassie had grace given her to refuse, but with a woful heart, and Heriotside rode off in black discontent, leaving poor Ailie to sigh her lone. He came back the next day and the next, but aye he got the same answer. A season of great doubt fell upon her soul. She had no clearness in her hope, nor any sense of God's promises. The Scriptures were an idle tale to her, prayer brought her no refreshment, and she was convicted in her conscience of the unpardonable sin. Had she been less full of pride she would have taken her troubles to good Doctor Chrystal and got comfort; but her grief made her silent and timorous, and she found no help anywhere. Her mother was ever at her side, seeking with coaxings and evil advice to drive her to the irrevocable step. And all the while there was her love for the man riving in her bosom and giving her no ease by night or day. She believed she had driven him away and repented her denial. Only her pride held her back from going to Heriot-

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side and seeking him herself. She watched the road hourly for a sight of his face, and when the darkness came she would sit in a corner brooding over her sorrows.

At last he came, speiring the old question. He sought the same tryst, but now he had a further tale. It seemed he was eager to get her away from the Skerburnside and auld Alison. His aunt, the Lady Balcrynie, would receive her gladly at his request till the day of their marriage. Let her but tryst with him at the hour and place he named, and he would carry her straight to Balcrynie, where she would be safe and happy. He named that hour, he said, to escape men's observation for the sake of her own good name. He named that place, for it was near her dwelling, and on the road between Balcrynie and Heriotside, which fords the Sker Burn. The temptation was more than mortal heart could resist. She gave him the promise he sought, stifling the voice of conscience; and as she clung to his neck it seemed to her that heaven was a poor thing compared with a man's love.

Three days remained till Beltane's Eve, and throughout the time it was noted that Heriotside behaved like one possessed. It may be that his conscience pricked him, or that he had a glimpse of his sin and its coming punishment. Certain it is that, if he had been daft before, he now ran wild in his pranks, and an evil report of him was in every mouth. He drank deep at the Cross Keys, and fought two battles with young lads that had angered him. One he let off with a touch in the shoulder, the other goes lame to this day from a wound he got in the groin. There was a word of the procurator-fiscal taking note

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of his doings, and troth, if they had continued long he must have fled the country. For a wager he rode his horse down the Dow Craig, wherefore the name of the place is the Horseman's Craig to this day. He laid a hundred guineas with the laird of Slipperfield that he would drive four horses through the Slipperfield loch, and in the prank he had his bit chariot dung to pieces and a good mare killed. And all men observed that his eyes were wild and his face grey and thin, and that his hand would twitch as he held the glass, like one with the palsy.

The eve of Beltane was lown and hot in the low country, with fire hanging in the clouds and thunder grumbling about the heavens. It seems that up in the hills it had been an awesome deluge of rain, but on the coast it was still dry and lowering. It is a long road from Heriotside to the Skerburnfoot. First you go down the Heriot Water, and syne over the Lang Muir to the edge of Mucklewham. When you pass the steadings of Mirehope and Cockmalane you turn to the right and ford the Mire Burn. That brings you on to the turnpike road, which you will ride till it bends inland, while you keep on straight over the Whinny Knowes to the Sker Bay. There, if you are in luck, you will find the tide out and the place fordable dryshod for a man on a horse. But if the tide runs, you will do well to sit down on the sands and content yourself till it turn, or it will be the solans and scarts of the Solloway that will be seeing the next of you. On this Beltane's Eve the young man, after supping with some wild young blades, bade his horse be saddled about ten o'clock. The company were eager to ken his errand, but he waved them

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back. "Bide here," he says, "and birl the wine till I return. This is a ploy of my own on which no man follows me." And there was that in his face as he spoke which chilled the wildest, and left them well content to keep to the good claret and the soft seat and let the daft laird go his own ways.

Well and on, he rode down the bridlepath in the wood, along the top of the Heriot glen, and as he rode he was aware of a great noise beneath him. It was not wind, for there was none, and it was not the sound of thunder, and aye as he speired at himself what it was it grew louder till he came to a break in the trees. And then he saw the cause, for Heriot was coming down in a furious flood, sixty yards wide, tearing at the roots of the aiks, and flinging red waves against the drystone dykes. It was a sight and sound to solemnize a man's mind, deep calling unto deep, the great waters of the hills running to meet with the great waters of the sea. But Heriotside recked nothing of it, for his heart had but one thought and the eye of his fancy one figure. Never had he been so filled with love of the lass, and yet it was not happiness but a deadly secret fear.

As he came to the Lang Muir it was geyan dark, though there was a moon somewhere behind the clouds. It was little he could see of the road, and ere long he had tried many moss-pools and sloughs, as his braw new coat bare witness. Aye in front of him was the great hill of Mucklewham, where the road turned down by the Mire. The noise of the Heriot had not long fallen behind him ere another began, the same eerie sound of burns crying to ither in the darkness. It seemed that the whole earth was over-

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run with waters. Every little runnel in the bog was astir, and yet the land around him was as dry as flax, and no drop of rain had fallen. As he rode on the din grew louder, and as he came over the top of Mirehope he kenned by the mighty rushing noise that something uncommon was happening with the Mire Burn. The light from Mirehope sheiling twinkled on his left, and had the man not been dozed with his fancies he might have observed that the steading was deserted and men were crying below in the fields. But he rode on, thinking of but one thing, till he came to the cot-house of Cockmalane, which is nigh the fords of the Mire.

John Dodds, the herd who bode in the place, was standing at the door, and he looked to see who was on the road so late.

"Stop," says he, "stop, Laird Heriotside. I kenna what your errand is, but it is to no holy purpose that ye're out on Beltane Eve. D'ye no hear the warning o' the waters?"

And then in the still night came the sound of Mire like the clash of armies.

"I must win over the ford," says the laird quietly, thinking of another thing.

"Ford!" cried John in scorn. "There'll be nae ford for you the nicht unless it be the ford o' the River Jordan. The burns are up, and bigger than man ever saw them. It'll be a Beltane's Eve that a' folk will remember. They tell me that Gled valley is like a loch, and that there's an awesome folk drooned in the hills. Gif ye were ower the Mire, what about crossin' the Caulds and the Sker?" says he, for he jaloused he was going to Gledsmuir.

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And then it seemed that that word brought the laird to his senses. He looked the air the rain was coming from, and he saw it was the air the Sker flowed. In a second, he has told me, the works of the devil were revealed to him. He saw himself a tool in Satan's hands, he saw his tryst a device for the destruction of the body, as it was assuredly meant for the destruction of the soul, and there came on his mind the picture of an innocent lass borne down by the waters with no place for repentance. His heart grew cold in his breast. He had but one thought, a sinful and reckless one—to get to her side, that the two might go together to their account. He heard the roar of the Mire as in a dream, and when John Dodds laid hands on his bridle he felled him to the earth. And the next seen of it was the laird riding the floods like a man possessed.

The horse was the grey stallion he aye rode, the very beast he had ridden for many a wager with the wild lads of the Cross Keys. No man but himself durst back it, and it had lamed many a hostler lad and broke two necks in its day. But it seemed it had the mettle for any flood, and took the Mire with little spurring. The herds on the hillside looked to see man and steed swept into eternity; but though the red waves were breaking about his shoulders and he was swept far down, he aye held on for the shore. The next thing the watchers saw was the laird struggling up the far bank, and casting his coat from him, so that he rode in his sark. And then he set off like wildfire across the muir towards the turnpike road. Two men saw him on the road and have recorded their experience. One was a gangrel,

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by name M'Nab, who was travelling from Gledsmuir to Allerkirk with a heavy pack on his back and a bowed head. He heard a sound like wind afore him, and, looking up, saw coming down the road a grey horse stretched out to a wild gallop and a man on its back with a face like a soul in torment. He kenned not whether it was the devil or mortal, but flung himself on the roadside, and lay like a corp for an hour or more till the rain aroused him. The other was one Sim Doolittle, the fish-hawker from Allerfoot, jogging home in his fish-cart from Gledsmuir fair. He had drunk more than was fit for him, and he was singing some light song, when he saw approaching, as he said, the pale horse mentioned in the Revelations, with Death seated as the rider. Thoughts of his sins came on him like a thunder-clap, fear loosened his knees, he leaped from the cart to the road, and from the road to the back of a dyke. Thence he flew to the hills, and was found the next morning far up among the Mire Craigs, while his horse and cart were gotten on the Aller sands, the horse lamed and the cart without the wheels.

At the tollhouse the road turns inland to Gledsmuir, and he who goes to Sker Bay must leave it and cross the wild land called the Whinny Knowes, a place rough with bracken and foxes' holes and old stone cairns. The tollman, John Gilzean, was opening his window to get a breath of air in the lown night when he heard and saw the approaching horse. He kenned the beast for Heriotside's, and, being a friend of the laird's, he ran down in all haste to open the yett, wondering to himself about the laird's errand on this night. A voice came down the road to

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him bidding him hurry; but John's old fingers were slow with the keys, and so it happened that the horse had to stop, and John had time to look up at the gash and woful face.

"Where away the nicht sae late, laird?" says John.

"I go to save a soul from hell," was the answer.

And then it seems that through the open door there came the chapping of a clock.

"Whatna hour is that?" asks Heriotside.

"Midnight," says John, trembling, for he did not like the look of things.

There was no answer but a groan, and horse and man went racing down the dark hollows of the Whinny Knowes.

How he escaped a broken neck in that dreadful place no human being will ever tell. The sweat, he has told me, stood in cold drops upon his forehead; he scarcely was aware of the saddle in which he sat; and his eyes were stelled in his head, so that he saw nothing but the sky ayont him. The night was growing colder, and there was a small sharp wind stirring from the east. But, hot or cold, it was all one to him, who was already cold as death. He heard not the sound of the sea nor the peesweeps startled by his horse, for the sound that ran in his ears was the roaring Sker Water and a girl's cry. The thought kept goading him, and he spurred the grey till the creature was madder than himself. It leaped the hole which they call the Devil's Mull as I would step over a thistle, and the next he kenned he was on the edge of the Sker Bay.

It lay before him white and ghastly, with mist blowing in wafts across it and a slow swaying of the

tides. It was the better part of a mile wide, but save for some fathoms in the middle where the Sker current ran, it was no deeper even at flood than a horse's fetlocks. It looks eerie at bright midday when the sun is shining and whaups are crying among the seaweeds; but think what it was on that awesome night with the powers of darkness brooding over it like a cloud. The rider's heart quailed for a moment in natural fear. He stepped his beast a few feet in, still staring afore him like a daft man. And then something in the sound or the feel of the waters made him look down, and he perceived that the ebb had begun and the tide was flowing out to sea.

He kenned that all was lost, and the knowledge drove him to stark despair. His sins came in his face like birds of night, and his heart shrank like a pea. He knew himself for a lost soul, and all that he loved in the world was out in the tides. There, at any rate, he could go too, and give back that gift of life he had so blackly misused. He cried small and soft like a bairn, and drove the grey out into the waters. And aye as he spurred it the foam should have been flying as high as his head; but in that uncanny hour there was no foam, only the waves running sleek like oil. It was not long ere he had come to the Sker channel, where the red moss-waters were roaring to the sea, an ill place to ford in midsummer heat, and certain death, as folks reputed it, in the smallest spate. The grey was swimming, but it seemed the Lord had other purposes for him than death, for neither man nor horse could drown. He tried to leave the saddle, but he could not; he flung the bridle from him, but the grey held on, as if some strong hand were guid-

THE OUTGOING OF THE TIDE

ing. He cried out upon the devil to help his own, he renounced his Maker and his God; but whatever his punishment, he was not to be drowned. And then he was silent, for something was coming down the tide.

It came down as quiet as a sleeping bairn, straight for him as he sat with his horse breasting the waters, and as it came the moon crept out of a cloud and he saw a glint of yellow hair. And then his madness died away and he was himself again, a weary and stricken man. He hung down over the tides and caught the body in his arms, and then let the grey make for the shallows. He cared no more for the devil and all his myrmidons, for he kenned brawly he was damned. It seemed to him that his soul had gone from him and he was as toom as a hazel-shell. His breath rattled in his throat, the tears were dried up in his head, his body had lost its strength, and yet he clung to the drowned maid as to a hope of salvation. And then he noted something at which he marvelled dumbly. Her hair was drookit back from her clay-cold brow, her eyes were shut, but in her face there was the peace of a child. It seemed even that her lips were smiling. Here, certes, was no lost soul, but one who had gone joyfully to meet her Lord. It may be that in that dark hour at the burn-foot, before the spate caught her, she had been given grace to resist her adversary and flung herself upon God's mercy.

And it would seem that it had been granted, for when he came to the Skerburnfoot there in the corner sat the weird-wife Alison, dead as a stone and shrivelled like a heather-birn. •

For days Heriotside wandered the country or sat in his own house with vacant eye and trembling hands.

Conviction of sin held him like a vice: he saw the lassie's death laid at his door, her face haunted him by day and night, and the word of the Lord dirled in his ears telling of wrath and punishment. The greatness of his anguish wore him to a shadow, and at last he was stretched on his bed and like to perish. In his extremity worthy Doctor Chrystal went to him unasked and strove to comfort him. Long, long the good man wrestled, but it seemed as if his ministrations were to be of no avail. The fever left his body, and he rose to stotter about the doors; but he was still in his torments, and the mercy-seat was far from him. At last in the back-end of the year came Mungo Muirhead to Caulds to the autumn communion, and nothing would serve him but he must try his hand at this storm-tossed soul. He spoke with power and unction, and a blessing came with his words, the black cloud lifted and showed a glimpse of grace, and in a little the man had some assurance of salvation. He became a pillar of Christ's Kirk, prompt to check abominations, notably the sin of witchcraft, foremost in good works; but with it all a humble man, who walked contritely till his death. When I came first to Caulds I sought to prevail upon him to accept the eldership, but he aye put me by, and when I heard his tale I saw that he had done wisely. I mind him well as he sat in his chair or daundered through Caulds, a kind word for every one and sage counsel in time of distress, but withal a severe man to himself and a crucifier of the body. It seems that this severity weakened his frame, for three years syne come Martinmas he was taken ill with a fever, and after a week's sickness he went to his account, where I trust he is accepted.

BY
J. J. BELL



THE SABBATH

IN STILTED fashion and lugubrious tones Mrs. Robinson read the concluding paragraph of the story:

"Suddenly his young compahion heard a scream, but when they looked, little Archibald was nowhere to be seen. He had fallen through the ice and disappeared! The alarm was raised, and willing helpers were soon on the spot; but it was some time before the dripping form was brought to land, and then, alas, the vital spark had fled!"

Solemnly Mrs. Robinson shut the book, which was bound in bright purple and emblazoned with the title *Patient Peter, or the Drunkard's Son; and Other Tales for Young People*.

"Does it mean he was droondit?" inquired Macgregor, who, seated on a stool between his elders' chairs, had been listening with a fair show of attention.

"Ay, he was droondit, dearie. And that's what wee Erchibald got for slidin' on the Sabbath Day! He fell through the ice——"

"Would he no' ha'e fell through on a week-day, Maw?"

Behind his evening paper, Mr. Robinson quaked almost silently.

"It's time, laddie," said Lizzie, "ye was awa' to your bed."

"But, Maw, if it had been a Seturday, would wee Erchibald no' ha'e got droondit?"

With an uneasy glance in her man's direction, she replied: "Maybe, if it had been a Seturday, he would ha'e been rescued in time."

"Whit wey was he no' rescued in time on the Sabbath?"

"Jist because he wasna! Noo up ye get and say 'guid nicht' to your Paw."

Macgregor rose obediently. "Guid nicht, Paw. Whit wey was he no' rescued in time on the Sabbath?"

Mr. Robinson put down his paper and tried to look serious. "Weel, Macgregor, that's no' an easy question; but, maybe, it bein' the Sabbath, wee Erchibald had had an extra big dinner, and sank quick, whilst the folk that tried for to rescue him had likewise had extra big dinners, and could only run slow; and so——"

"John, behave yoursel'!" said Lizzie. "It's no' a thing to be funny aboot. Wee Erchibald sank, because the watter poured into him and——"

"If I had an extra big dinner," put in Macgregor, "I would float, because the watter couldna pour into me."

John guffawed; his son joined in the merriment, without quite knowing why—and resumed his stool.

"That's enough!" Lizzie said sternly. "Ye should think shame o' yoursel', John, to mak' a mock o' sic

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a nice story. And mind this, Macgregor, forbye it bein' the Sabbath day, wee Erchibald's parents had warned him no' to gang near the pond!"

"If they hadna warned him, would he no' ha'e fell through?"

"Tits, laddie! Ye've speired enough stupid-like questions. Look at the clock!"

"It's Seturday nicht, Maw!"

"The wean's fine, Lizzie," Mr. Robinson interposed. "Let him bide a wee while longer."

"Na, na! He's ower late as it is. Come, Macgregor!"

"It was a daft-like story, onywey," Macgregor remarked, doubtless with a view to making delay. "A' the stories in that book are daft-like."

"Ye're no' to say that about the braw book your Aunt Purdie gi'ed ye on your birthday!"

"Ach, I wish she had kep' her braw book!"

"Macgregor!"

Mr. Robinson made an effort to do his duty. "Your Aunt Purdie," he said, "aye means weel, though she seldom does it."

"John!"

"What better could I say, woman?"

"Oh, man, I whiles wish ye were dumb!"

"Maw, whit wey dae ye wish Paw was dumb? I like to hear him speakin'."

II

Happily, at this moment, a diversion was provided. From the next room came a wail.

With a sigh, Lizzie got up. "I canna think what's

wrang wi' wee Jeanie th' nicht: she's that fractious."

"Gi'e her ile, Maw!" Macgregor said helpfully.

"It's you that'll get ile," his mother retorted, from the doorway, "if ye dinna behave better!"

"I'm behavin' fine. If I had been wee Erchibald——"

"Oh, haud your tongue!" she said, and left the kitchen.

Macgregor turned to his father. "Maw's awfu' crabbit th' nicht, is she no', Paw?"

"Whisht, ma mannie! She didna like us makin' fun about wee Erchibald—dod, it's a comical name when ye come to think on it!"

"Dod, ay!" Macgregor heartily agreed. "I'm gled it's no' ma name."

"Still," said John more soberly, "that's no' exactly the p'int. Ye maun try for to please your maw; and she meant the story o' wee Erchibald to be a lesson to ye. D'ye see?"

"Ay, I see. . . . I wouldna slide on the Sabbath. . . . There's nae pond to slide on, onywey."

"Ah, but there's ither things ye shouldna dae." Mr. Robinson, looking reflective, proceeded to re-light his pipe.

"What like things, Paw?"

"Weel, for example"—Mr. Robinson threw away the match and scratched the back of his head—"for example . . . dod, there's an awfu' heap o' things ye shouldna dae! I dinna want to keep ye up a' nicht."

"I'm no sleepy. It's Seturday nicht. It's a lang while since I had a bit taiblet."

Mr. Robinson shook his head.

"The taiblet's in the dresser-drawer, Paw."

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"Na, na! Your maw pit it there, because she thocht ye had had plenty—and I wouldna wonder if she was richt!"

"I never had plenty in a' ma life!"

Mr. Robinson checked a guffaw. "Ye wouldna like to ha'e to tak' ile in the mornin'—eh?"

I would tak' ile in the mornin', if I got taiblet noo."

"'Deed, I wish I could be certain whether that's the proper speerit, or no'," his father remarked. "But your maw would be vexed—and that settles it! It would be the same as disobeyin' her—jist like wee Erchibald disobeyin' his maw—and paw. D'ye see?"

"A-ay, I see—but I wish Aunt Purdie had kep' her book!" Macgregor yawned. "I'm no' sleepy," he made haste to explain. "I was jist openin' ma mooth. Tell us a story, Paw—no' a story like wee Erchibald."

"It's ower late, ma mannie. It's time ye was——"

"Weel, tell us some o' the things ye shouldna dae on the Sabbath."

"Aw, I think we'd best leave that to your maw. She's got a better memory nor me."

"Whit wey has she got a better memory?"

"I dinna ken, but she's got an extraor'nar' memory. She used to be able to recite the Hunner-and-nineteenth Psalm, wantin' the Book, and noo, I think, she's got your Uncle Purdie's price-list o' groceries off by he'rt."

Macgregor considered for a moment before he said: "I ken Uncle Purdie's price-list. I dinna think I'll ask Maw."

"Weel, weel," said Mr. Robinson, with commendable gravity, "it's maybe no' necessary. Efter a', ye've got your conscience to tell ye when it's something that would vex your maw—and me. Eh?"

Macgregor nodded. . . . "Ha'e you got a conscience, Paw?"

"Dod, ay!"

"Whaur dae ye keep it?"

Mr. Robinson smiled in spite of himself. "To tell ye the truth, Macgregor, I'm no' jist certain whether it's in ma heid, or in ma he'rt."

"Wullie Thomson keeps his in his inside. When it's bad, his aunt gi'es him meddicine."

"Puir Willie! And whaur dae you keep yours, ma mannie?"

"In ma neck."

"Your neck? Hoo dae ye ken it's there?"

"When it's bad, it gi'es me a pain in ma neck."

"Oh, I see, I see!" Mr. Robinson softly exclaimed. "Efter a', maybe ye deserve a wee bit taib——"

Lizzie came in, and halted, frowning.

"Man, ha'e ye nae conscience, encouragin' Macgregor to sit up——"

John put up his hand. "That's funny, Lizzie! We've jist been takin' aboot consciences, and if ye had heard us, I dinna think ye would be that vexed. Macgregor's ready to gang to his bed noo, and, between you and me and the dresser, I think he deserves a taste o'—ye ken what!"

Lizzie looked from one to the other; her expression softened.

"Maw," said Macgregor, "Paw deserves a taste, tae."

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"Ye're jist a pair o' cajolers!" she said, and went to the drawer.

III

Macgregor's parents thought they did their Sunday duty in taking him to morning church. His friend Willie Thomson's aunt, with whom Willie lived, was made of sterner stuff, and dragged the reluctant youngster to both services—11 a.m. and 2 p.m.—in an old-fashioned kirk, where the sermons lasted for forty minutes. After those "religious exercises," however, Miss Thomson was apt to sink into sloth, and her nephew was free to do as he pleased.

The boys did not often meet on a Sunday. After dinner, if the weather were not really bad, Macgregor went walking with his father, usually to the docks, where the shipping had a strong attraction for both. If the weather were hopeless, John entertained his son in divers ways at the fireside.

But on this particular Sunday Mr. Robinson had to go to visit a friend who had met with an accident in the engineering works, where both earned their living. Having received from his mother strict injunctions to return "stracht hame," Macgregor was permitted to convoy his father a part of the way; and so straightly did he come back that Lizzie rewarded him with a further permission to go and meet his father at five o'clock, on condition that he did not stray from the main street.

It was then that he encountered Willie Thomson.

"Hallo! Whaur are ye gaun?" said Willie.

"To meet ma paw, at five o'clock," Macgregor answered, without stopping.

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"What's your hurry? It's no' five yet."

Once, long ago—as time is reckoned by youth—Macgreegor, in replying to a similar question, had confessed to a promise made to his mother, thereby evoking a jeer from Willie; and though he had then successfully punched Willie's nose, he had never again brought his mother's name into an argument. Now he simply said: "Never you mind!" and continued his walk.

"Ye've plenty time," Willie persisted, keeping pace on his extraordinarily thin legs. "I've got something to show ye."

"What is it?"

"I'll no' let ye see it, unless ye stop."

"I dinna believe ye've got onything," said Macgreegor, slowing down.

"I'll bet ye a thoosan' pound to a rotten oranger it's worth seein'!"

"Let's see it!" said Macgreegor, and halted.

"Come up yon close"—Willie indicated an entry nearby—"and ye'll see it."

Macgreegor hesitated. "If ye're coddin' me, ye'll get a bat on the nose!"

"I'm no coddin' ye!" Willie drew the edge of his hand across his throat—solemn sign of good faith. "Come on!"

They entered the close.

"Come further in," said Willie.

A little girl sitting on the stone stair, half-way up, just beyond the bend, and nursing a one-legged, headless doll, peeped down through the rails, and swiftly drew back.

"We're safe here," Willie remarked, after a look

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round. "Noo ye've got to swear to tell naeboddy."

"I swear to tell naeboddy. Hurry up!"

From a pocket, Willie produced a door-key of impressive size.

"Is that a'?" cried Macgreegor. "A washin'-hoose key!"

"It's no' a washin'-hoose key! It's the key o' the back door o' a big hoose that gentry used to bide in."

Macgreegor stared. "Whaur did ye get it?"

"Ma aunt used to work for the gentry, lang syne, and when the auld man croaked, she forgot to gi'e back the key, and it's been hingin' on a nail in the kitchen ever since. I think she's prood to ha'e the key o' a gentry hoose, though it's been emp'y for years."

"Whit wey is it emp'y?"

"A' the folk gaed awa' efter the auld man croaked."

"But what's the use o' a key o' an emp'y hoose?"

Willie closed his right eye and grinned mysteriously.

Macgreegor was intrigued. "Does your aunt whiles gang to the hoose?" he asked.

"Catch her! She's ower feart for ghosts."

"Ghosts!" echoed Macgreegor, eyes wide.

"But I'm no' feart for ghosts," said Willie. "If a ghost cam' near me, it would get a thick ear! Are *you* feart, Macgreegor? I believe ye are—haw, haw!"

"Is't a daud on the beak ye're wantin'?"

"Aw, I was jist jokin'," Willie made haste to explain. He was the elder by a couple of years, but Macgreegor was the sturdier.

Macgreegor accepted the apology. "Does your

aunt ken ye've got the key?" he inquired.

"Nae fears! She would be wild, if she kenned. But I left her snoozin' and snorin'. She'll no' wauken up for ages. She's no' as holy at nicht as she is in the mornin'."

There was a pause till Macgregor said: "What are ye gaun to dae wi' the key, Wullie?"

Willie's answer was another question uttered with a certain hoarseness: "What dae ye say, Macgregor, to play at bein' burglars?" In response to his friend's gape Willie repeated his words.

"But," said Macgregor, before he knew, "it's the Sabbath!"

"A' the best burglars," Willie readily returned, "dae their best burglaries on the Sabbath, when the folk are at the kirk, or sleepin' off their dinners."

"But they wouldna be sae daft as to burgle an emp'y hoose."

"They would burgle it quick enough, if they thocht there was gold in it!"

"Gold!"

"Ay, gold! Ye see, the auld man was a goldsmith, and I wouldna wonder if he left some gold lyin' about."

"But we couldna keep the gold. It would be stealin'!"

"We would tak' the gold to the polis office, and get a reward!"

"Hoo much would we get?"

"Maybe hauf-a-croon—each," replied Willie, quoting his most extravagant notion of wealth.

"Hauf-a-croon!" Macgregor repeated in a hushed voice. "Jings! I wish I could come wi' ye, Wullie."

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"What! Are ye no' comin'? Your paw'll likely be late," said Willie. • "Haw, haw, I believe ye're henny!"

That settled it.

"I'll come!" said Macgreegor. "But we'll need to hurry. Whaur's your gentry hoose?"

"Close by—in Chattan Place."

"Come on, then! And if there's nae gold, I'll——"

"Fair do!" Willie protested. "If there's nae gold, it'll be as bad for me as for you."

"So it will," Macgreegor admitted. "Come on, Wullie!"

Though they had seldom modified their voices in the close, they left it on tiptoe, and emerged looking guilty.

IV

Before the locality had, as the saying is, "gone down", the houses in Chattan Place had been desirable enough residences, occupied by prosperous citizens of Glasgow. But that was forty years ago, and most of them had long ceased to be homes. Number Seven, the abode of the departed goldsmith, had been the last to be used as such, and now all the others served as business premises for plumbers, house-painters, second-hand furniture dealers, and so forth.

They were square-built villas, which must have exhibited a certain elegance in their day. The front doors were reached by flights of broad steps rising high above the basements, the windows of which were stoutly barred. Between them and the street,

guarded by iron railings, were—or had been—small garden plots, in one or two of which some neglected turf drearily survived.

Number Seven represented Desolation. Grime covered the only front window which had not been broken, discoloured boards the others, which had received the attentions of boys with catapults. The heavy door looked as though it had not been opened for a generation; its once shining plate was black. The bell-handle had been wrenched away. And, surely most melancholy thing of all, was the painted sign above the door—"For Sale"—the lettering almost obliterated by the rain and soot of years. Verily, a house forsaken!

Probably this aspect of Number Seven did not trouble the boys as they surveyed it from the street, on which the last rays of the sinking sun still palely lingered. Their anxieties were then concentrated on the problem of making an entrance, unobserved by human eye. Yet that seemed easy enough, for, the day being Sunday, all the other houses were deserted, and the street itself was steep enough to discourage its use as a thoroughfare. Still, there was no knowing when a pedestrian might come round one of the corners. Nor was there difficulty about ingress to what had once been a garden, for, though the gate was fastened with a rusty chain and padlock, some of the railings were broken.

At the end of five minutes of indecision, Macgregor, impatient, cried: "Come on, if ye're comin'!"—and darted through a break in the railings, thence round to the back of the house, with Willie at his heels.

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They came to a low-set door that had once been green. It was flanked by dingy, stone walls with barred windows.

"Hurry up wi' the key, Wullie!"

Willie forced it in.

"My, it's stiff!"

"Let me try. . . . See if ye can find a stick."

After search among the straggling grass, Willie came back with a likely, though half-rotten, piece of wood. Forced by the leverage, the key turned—but with an awful screech.

"Oh, gosh," muttered Willie, "if a polisman hears that, we're done for! Quick, let's win inside! Push—push, for ony favour!"

The door gave, with a grinding, grating noise, and they all but fell inside.

"Shut it—quick!" panted Willie, and helped to do so. "Gor, that was a near thing—but I think we're safe noo!"

They were in a passage, gloomy, damp, dusty, cobwebby—altogether forbidding. To the right was a door, open. They advanced gingerly and looked into what had been the kitchen. Part of the ceiling had fallen, also a good deal of soot. The walls were discoloured by moisture.

"I doot," Macgreegor began, and then lowered his voice, because it seemed so loud, "I doot there's nae gold."

"The auld man wouldna keep it doon here," Willie returned in discreet tones. "Come on up the stair."

With furtive glances they passed other doors, and went up a flight of stone steps, halted for a few

moments in the hall, and then turned into the apartment on the left—the dining-room. The boarded windows admitted but little light. Much of the paper had peeled from the walls.

"There's naething here but dirt," Macgregor remarked.

But the spirit of adventure was upon them, for the time being, and they proceeded to investigate the whole house, collecting in the process much sooty dust, on clothes, hands and faces.

They came to a pause in a front room, on the top floor—the only room with a glazed window. It was less cheerless than the others, though the sun had now gone down behind some high buildings in the distance.

"Dinna look oot o' the winda, in case a polisman spots ye," said Willie, in a husky whisper. He cleared his throat. "If we had matches, we could mak' a fire and sit roun' it, like real burglars, and tell stories. That would be fine fun—eh?"

"Ay," Macgregor agreed, without enthusiasm.

There was silence till Willie said: "Tell us a story noo, Macgregor. It'll be better nor singin' dumb."

After some persuasion, Macgregor, who, no doubt, was also feeling the stillness oppressive, narrated in rambling fashion the tragedy of "Wee Erchibald."

"That's a rotten story," was Willie's comment.

"It's the only story I can mind. Tell a story, yoursel'!"

"I canna mind ony."

They passed to the next room, but in its semi-

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darkness found nothing to stir converse, and returned.

"Tell the story about Erchibald again," said Willie, "but dinna mak' him get droondit."

"He *had* to get droondit! It was the Sabbath. . . . Are ye no' for gaun hame, Wullie? There's nae gold here."

"If it wasna sae cauld, I wouldna hurry hame, but I'll gang to please ye. Ye're no' feart, are ye?"

"No' me! Are you?"

"What would I be feart for? I'm in nae hurry, because I dinna get ma supper till seeven, when ma aunt comes out o' her snooze."

"I get ma tea at six, and I'm gey hungry," said Macgregor. "But I'll wait awhile, if ye like."

Willie generously refused such sacrifice, and presently they went down the stair, which was timber-built, together.

"Awfu' noise feet mak' in an emp'y hoose," remarked Willie. "It's a guid thing we're no' real burglars."

"It's a peety it's the Sabbath," said Macgregor, irrelevantly.

In the hall, Willie observed, firstly, that it was getting dark and, secondly, that his friend's face was "awfu' dirty."

"It'll be darker doon the stair, and so's yours," Macgregor replied. He moistened his handkerchief with nature's moisture and applied it to his begrimed countenance, thereby obtaining a nice, streaky effect.

"Maybe we'll get watter in the kitchen," said Willie. "Ye canna be seen on the street like that, on the Sabbath day!"

"It's a peety it's the Sabbath," Macgregor said again, all at once depressed.

"It's a peety it's no' Hallowe'en. Oor faces would be the vera thing."

Of course, there was no water in the kitchen. And as they stood, in the failing light, at the rubbish-littered sink, they heard a sudden sharp scurrying noise under their feet.

A yell burst from Willie. "Oh, oh, it's rats! Come on, quick!"

They bolted out to the passage and to the back door. Willie, first to reach it, grasped the handle. It turned, but the door refused to yield.

"Pull, Willie, pull!" cried Macgregor.

"I'm pullin'!" gasped Willie—and forthwith sat down, the handle in his fingers.

Quickly they realized their dire situation, but it was the thought of the rats that made them rush for the stair. Nor did they pause till they had reached the top landing.

"They—they'll no' come up here," Macgregor said breathlessly, listening hard.

Receiving no response from Willie, who was shaking, he took him by the arm and led him into the front room with the glazed window. Even there it was now dusky.

"Dinna greet, Wullie."

"I'm no' greetin' "—a resounding sniff—"but what are we to dae?"

Macgregor had no ready answer, but after a while he said: "Maybe your aunt'll notice the key's awa' and——"

"She never notices onything she should notice,

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and, onywey, she'll no' be wauken for ages. We'll jist ha'e to open the winda and cry for help."

"That would be the jail for us!" said Macgregor, horrified. What would his mother say?

"The jail would be better nor this." Willie went over to the window. "Come on and help me." With his sleeve he rubbed some of the thick grime from the pane, and obtained a hazy view of the street, which seemed very far below. "Oh, dash!" he muttered. "We've jist missed the lamplichter. He's awa' roun' the corner."

The window refused to open.

"We'll ha'e to break it," Willie said desperately.

"Nae use breakin' it till there's somebody to hear us. Let's watch."

"If it hadna been the Sabbath, there would be plenty folk aboot."

"Ay, it's a peety it's the Sabbath," Macgregor said once more, very drearily.

They watched in silence . . . they drew closer together.

"I wish ye would speak," said Willie at last.

"I dinna ken what to speak aboot."

"Speak aboot onything. Tell the story aboot Wee Erchibald. Ye can let him be droondit, if ye like."

Macgregor told the story—three times. It was now almost dark, and they were standing arm in arm.

"Dae ye think," said Willie slowly, "Wee Erchibald gaed to the Bad Place?"

"Ay," Macgregor answered, without hesitation. "It was the Sabbath day."

A pause.

"Dae ye think—dae ye think us yins'll gang to the Bad Place, Macgregor?"

"I'm no' heedin', if I get h-hame first."

"S-same here, though ma aunt's no' muckle worth. Are ye cauld?"

"Perishin'!"

Now each had an arm around the other.

"Tell the story aboot Wee Erchibald again," said Willie, after a long silence, "but pretend it was a week-day."

The sound of church bells calling to evening service came to them.

"The holy folk ha'e a' the luck!" sighed Willie.

"Maybe somebody'll come up the street noo," faltered Macgregor.

But nobody came. The bells ceased. Darkness fell.

v

"Let's break the winda and yell," said Willie suddenly.

Macgregor agreed hopelessly. "I'll lift ye, and ye can kick oot the gless."

His arms went round his friend—then relaxed.

"Oh, what was that?" whispered Willie, and began to tremble. "A noise doon the stair! A g-ghost!"

Macgregor shuddered, but though his voice shook and was hoarse, he called loudly enough:

"Ghost, dinna ye daur to come up here, or Wullie Thomson'll gi'e ye a thick ear!"

"Na, na, Ghost," quavered Willie, "I wouldna hurt ye for onything!"

And then a voice—a human voice—came up:

THE SABBATH

"Are ye there, Macgreegor?"

"Paw!"

VI

It cannot be said that the meeting was altogether a joyous one. Mr. Robinson, who was accompanied by Miss Thomson and a little girl hugging a one-legged and headless doll, said very little; but the aunt did not spare her nephew.

"Weel," said Mr. Robinson, taking advantage of her pause for breath, "I think we'd best be gettin' hame."

So they set out, the children marching solemnly in front, dumb, till the little girl spoke, saying:

"I heard ye in the close, and when I seen Macgreegor's paw seekin' for him, I tell't him. And I hope," she added primly, "ye'll never forget I saved your lifes."

Let no careful mother imagine that her earnest teaching is ever altogether wasted. In that not too happy moment, Macgreegor Robinson actually remembered his manners.

"Thenk ye kindly," he said; "and I hope your doll'll sune be better." He then nudged the silent William, muttering: "Can ye no' be polite-like?"

"Wha could be polite-like," Willie dismally returned, "if they was gaun to get what I'm gaun to get frae her?" With his thumb he pointed over his shoulder.

"What are ye gaun to get frae her?"

"A big cup o' Gregory's Mixtur', wi' a Queen Anne Pooder in it."

"Will ye tak' that?"

"I'll get naething else to eat till I dae."

Father and son were alone. Macgreegor had faltered out his confession.

"It's a bad job, Macgreegor," John was saying. "Your maw was terrible pit aboot at ye daein' sic a thing on the Sabbath. Ye see, her bein' anxious, I had to run back and tell her what the lassie had tell't me. . . . Aweel, there's naething ye can dae except tell her ye're sorry. Ye'll mind that—eh?"

Macgreegor nodded and gulped.

Nothing more was said.

A little later, they entered the shining kitchen.

"Here he is, Lizzie," said John, with a glance of appeal, which was ignored.

Mrs. Robinson never "raged." Her wrath was of the cold sort. She gave her son one look and passed the Sentence of Disgrace:

"Gang to your bed!"

"I—I'm sorry, Maw."

She pointed to the door. "Wash yoursel' first. There's soap and watter waitin' for ye."

"I—I've got a pain in ma neck, Maw."

"Ye've catched the cauld—nae wonder! I'll fetch ye a bit flannen for your neck and a pig to your feet. Gang!"

Drooping, he went out.

"Lizzie," said John, "Macgreegor hasna catched the cauld. It's his conscience workin'."

"His what?"

"His conscience. It works in his neck—last nicht he tell't me."

"Weel," she said dryly, "it's a bit late in commencin' its work!"

THE SABBATH

"A conscience usually is. Itherwise, we would a' be perfec'. Come, woman, be easy on the laddie!"

"That's enough, John! Ye'll no' cajole me this time! He deserves to be punished, and he's gaun to be punished! It would ha'e been bad enough ony ither day, but this is the Sabbath!"

John hesitated and said: "As ye say, it's the Sabbath."

Apparently not hearing, she went over to the fire, set the kettle on to boil, and stood staring at it.

He came over and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Ay, Lizzie, it's the Sabbath," he said softly. "I'll say nae mair."

She shook off his hand—but caught it as it fell.

"Ach, John, it's no' fair o' ye," she muttered; "but I suppose I'll ha'e to—to dae something—forbye the flannen—for the pain in his neck."

And she went to do it.

BY
WINIFRED DUKE



CAPTAIN PERT

SHE LIVED with her mother, who was a widow, in the one cottage. He lived in the other with his mother, who was not a widow, but whose husband stayed away so much at sea that she might equally well have been for all the use that he was to her. Mrs. Paton, being a widow, enjoyed a small pension through the bounty of her late husband's employers. Mrs. Pert, not being a widow, subsisted on her own irregular earnings as a charwoman and an occasional postal order from her man at sea, when he deigned to remember the existence of his wife and child.

The coast road which linked the villages from Finhaven to Aberdeen trailed its white and dusty miles between many-coloured fields that ran up to the skyline on the one hand and tilted down towards the sea upon the other. It was a bit of country that tugs at the heartstrings. Dark woods, the plainness of ploughland, rough stone dykes sunken at the edge of the lanes that severed the fields on their way to isolated farm or cottage, rejoiced the eye with their angles and outlines softened and effaced by the pervading sea mist which stole up to cloak the landscape.

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Midway between Bush and Berbie, seen from the highroad as if flung down haphazard by some giant's hand, lay the scattered roofs and dwellings of Sandhaven, the fishing village where Mrs. Pert and Mrs. Paton lived.

A dark lane, rough to the tread, moist and sodden for weeks after any spell of rain, turned off from the highroad, and went down in a steady descent to the village and the quay. At the bottom, where half the houses seemed to have turned their backs upon the only means of approaching them, as if in contempt or defiance, the lane split into several directions. One ran on through the village, ending parallel with the railway line cutting the fields above it; another dived sharply towards the quay; a third slanted up directly to the little station, a collection of windy sheds and a strip of pebbled platform, sunk in green banks and gay with flower beds. In the middle of this triangle of ways, seemingly uncertain which one to take, and deciding after all to remain where it was, there stood against the side of the road, the blunt end turned towards it, a house. Looking at it more closely, it was really two cottages, built together. Each had its warped, green-painted door set in the solid stone, with a window on either side and one above. These stared out upon a rough little garden, where hens perambulated and picked up a scanty living.

The cottage dwellers had all things in common. They shared the moss-smeared, leaking rain barrel, the garden, as exercise and feeding-ground for mutual fowls. The same gate, creaking, ill-hung, set in a high wall, admitted themselves, or any who came

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to see either woman. The gate always creaked. In a high wind it swung and squealed. On winter nights, calm nights, wet nights, it could be heard, whining a faint, insistent protest against its own impotence.

Mrs. Paton, who lived in the first cottage with her daughter Elizabeth, was rosy, bustling, and popular. Elizabeth was not like her, being lean and dark, with a bitter mouth, a mean eye, and an unfriendly disposition. Mrs. Paton's husband had been head gardener at Benholm, a neighbouring estate. Consequently she enjoyed basking in the twilight of his reputation as a sober and esteemed servant, a hard worker, a non-smoker, and a good Presbyterian. She lived in her cottage rent-free. Mrs. Pert had to pay rent for hers.

Mrs. Pert was thin and querulous. She found it hard to make ends meet, and to hold up her head in Sandhaven circles as triumphantly as Mrs. Paton did. There were no stories afloat about Mrs. Paton's husband. There were plenty current concerning Mrs. Pert's. Some people declared that he had never existed, and that the "Mrs." in her case was purely a courtesy title. Others insisted that they remembered a big, bearded, truculent man who had arrived unexpectedly one night, roaring drunk, slept off his potations in the little front garden, and vanished next morning before his identity could be established or the story substantiated. Mrs. Pert's hourly nightmare was a repetition of this episode. Her bitterest moments were when she watched her neighbour, habited in her weeds, carrying a bunch of flowers, and accompanied by her creditable daughter, making a pious pilgrimage to the little cemetery that lay half-

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way up the lane. The laird, whose father the late Paton had worked for, had not merely provided the widow with an annuity and a cottage. He had put up an expensive tombstone, recording the name, age, and virtues of the deceased gardener. Mrs. Pert's thin bosom swelled as she contemplated the gross unfairness of things in this unsatisfactory world.

Her son John added to her trials. He was the same age as Elizabeth Paton, a sullen, unruly lout, for ever hanging about the harbour. The sea, ships, boats, sailors, were his secret passion. Mrs. Pert had been a farmer's daughter, and yearned for her son to display some of the qualities and ideals of his yeoman forebears. Instead, he was growing alarmingly like his seafaring father in appearance, disposition, and inclinations. Elizabeth, of course, was destined for good service, preferably in the laird's family. Mrs. Paton's ambitions for her daughter were bounded by the genteel dependence of lady's maid to the laird's daughters.

With all these puzzles, differences, inequalities, disadvantages, and propinquity, it may easily be seen that the two women were not congenial. The poor can never get far away from one another. Neither could go out at her own door without being seen by her neighbour. Sounds could be overheard, even conversation, if voices became incautiously raised. They met perpetually, each feeding her hens, looking out for her child returning home, shaking a mat in the fresh air. They spoke. They nodded. They commented, dryly, briefly, on weather or local events. Even their religion divided them. Mrs. Pert went to the ugly kirk along the village street, when she

went anywhere. Mrs. Paton, from years of good service, borrowed her form of worship from her employers. She called herself an Episcopalian, was occasionally—O bitter pill to Mrs. Pert—driven in to church at Finhaven by the laird's wife, and talked glibly of Elizabeth's approaching confirmation. She and Cecilia Carnegie, the laird's youngest daughter, were to be "done" together.

Despite all this, there is just a bare possibility that the two women might have existed more or less tolerantly side by side, had it not been for the drying-green. The drying-green represented the last straw to Mrs. Pert. To Mrs. Paton it was the final aggravation in the long list of minor aggravations that had piled up steadily since she had been neighbour to John's mother.

The cottage garden in the front was a wilderness devoted to poultry. The ground behind was a rough rise of bare earth, cut by a high wall. It was useless for growing things, drying things, or burying things. From its ineligibility as a suitable spot for hanging out the weekly wash, a substitute had to be sought. Beyond the cottage that was Mrs. Pert's dwelling there sloped a small field of rough grass. It "went with" the bargain when both women took their houses—Mrs. Paton at the laird's expense, Mrs. Pert at her own. The field became a perpetual bone of contention. Mrs. Pert insisted that, as it was at the side of *her* cottage, she should enjoy the sole use of it. Mrs. Paton, in her effective role of lone widow, evoked the aid of laird and landlord. They shook their heads over a clause in the agreement, appointing the occupants of both cottages joint use of the field

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as a drying-green. Each refused to give up her poultry, and utilize the front garden instead. They continued to share their hatred and a long clothes-line. It hung saggingly across the wind-bitten grass, as if conscious of the unpleasantness which it caused. Mrs. Pert had the end from the twisted tree to the drunken-looking pole in the middle of the ground. Mrs. Paton had from the pole to the hook in the side of Mrs. Pert's house. Every Monday they met on the field of battle, the mouth of each bursting with venom and bristling with clothes-pegs. They tried washing on separate days, with dismal results. Mrs. Paton declared that Mrs. Pert's Johnny, by leaning out of his mother's kitchen window, had cut Mrs. Paton's end of the clothes-line, causing the damp garments extending from it to fall on the muddy grass. Mrs. Pert vowed that the boy had been out all day, and that Mrs. Paton's Elizabeth was seen running in the field with the laird's dogs, who had jumped up, tearing and dirtying Mrs. Pert's spotless wash. Each woman accused the other of encroaching on her portion of the line. Each woman could have cut off her share of it, and strangled her neighbour with the same. The children carried on the feud. Elizabeth threw clothes-pegs at John. John dressed up in Mrs. Paton's nicely drying print and apron to frighten Elizabeth. Monday became Black Monday. a day of dread. In windy spring mornings, blazing summer ones, veiled autumn ones, bitter winter ones, both women, with bared arms and burning hearts, hung out their wash. On Mondays—washing-day—they never addressed one another. Each would fulfil her task, and go back into her house, voiceless, hating

the other. The children learned to keep out of the way, or to stay very quiet, on washing-days.

The years went on. In the little front garden rank weeds grew and flourished. In the two cottages flanked by the little garden, hate, a ranker weed, thrived riotously, luxuriously, fed by envy, impotent and undying.

II

The outstanding happenings in Mrs. Pert's barren life during its last years were the death of her husband and the departure of her son John. These events did not coincide. Several months divided them. The first was much the pleasanter, although it could not be denied that the second brought a certain measure of relief. The first removed a nightmare, and meant actually a small increase in money. The second deprived her of her son's companionship, but he had begun to get into bad ways, and Mrs. Pert heard the village comments without being able to contradict them.

She always suspected that it was Elizabeth Paton who drove him away.

Mrs. Paton had continued to prosper. Elizabeth had done her credit at school, whereas only the intervention of the minister, pitying Mrs. Pert, had saved John from expulsion and scandal. The two mothers, each at her door, used to watch the boy and girl coming up the slope at the end of the long street on their way home from their mutual studies. They were a great contrast—Elizabeth, slim and graceful, "a real lady", her mother reflected proudly; John,

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hulking and awkward, swinging his books, talking in the harsh East Coast accent which sounded so oddly beside Elizabeth's mincing refinement. She was endeavouring to speak like the Misses Carnegie, and nourished a secret and undying grievance against her mother for having sent her to the village school, instead of to some superior establishment in Finhaven. Mrs. Paton pleaded her poverty. Elizabeth's thin mouth curled. The laird could quite well have managed it, would have, if taken the right way. Why had not her mother cried, and regretted that her husband's death should deprive his only bairn of so much advantage in the shape of a good education? Her mother did not make half enough use of rich folk like the Carnegies. Elizabeth would play her cards better, once she was safely an inmate of their house. She glanced at John with aversion and dislike. It was not by any choice of hers that he had taken to walking home with her every afternoon, although their ways lay together. She had her choice of school-boy escort. In her soul there lurked a secret germ of fear. After the last house ended there was a dark, rough bit of laneway to be groped before reaching the gate that led to safety and home. In winter it was eerie, with only the station lights far up the fields, and the one blurred lamp set in its iron frame in the wall running past the two cottages. The other night. . . . She bit her lip. There had not even been the lamp. A storm had broken the glass, and the high wind blew out the flame. As she fumbled along the wall in the blackness, the sea in her ears, John had come up from behind, seized her, and kissed her. She had thrust him off, fury lending her a nervous

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force alien to her slight body. A medley of feelings surged up in her heart, amongst which disgust, alarm, and rage predominated. He was sullenly conscious of her soft cheek shrinking from his rough lips, her girlish weakness beating down his brute strength. A sudden skurry of wind raving up from the quay flung their bodies against each other. She clutched at her hat, and found his arms round her. . . .

"Foo dare ye?" she stammered furiously. In moments of wrath her surface gentility of speech and manner dropped from her. She relapsed into becoming what she was, primitive, countrybred, common.

"Elizabeth!" He muttered her name, his head hanging, his arms still girdling her soft body.

"Let me gang!" Fear was fast swamping anger.

"No for a minute." Strength was giving way to abject pleading. "Elizabeth, listen," he begged. "Dinna gang ben. I—I love ye."

She released herself, throwing back her head. Her laughter, shrill, mocking, was cruel as the sea lipping the stony beach not many yards away. Her contempt chilled him like an east wind.

"You love me? A lout the like o' you!" She rocked to and fro, maddening in her warm nearness, her scornful mirth.

"What way no?" Suddenly he stood over her, masterful, terrifying. "Elizabeth, gin ye'll wait, gin ye'd care—some day, A'll dae wonders." He drew a long, struggling breath.

"I believe ye." Her laugh was wavering, and faintly curious.

"A tell ye A wull." He squared his shoulders.

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"A'll mak' money—a lot o' money. Div ye suppose A'll stay here a' my life?" His boastful tones changed to pleading. "Elizabeth, wull ye no wait? It'd be something tae work for, gin A thocht ye liket me."

The lane was black and unlighted, noisy with great wind. Her hand, searching desperately along the wall, unexpectedly encountered the latch of the gate. She thrust it open, and stumbled into its protecting shelter. Away from his looming presence, its menace and vague terror, with the lights and solidity of home just at her back, she felt reckless and emboldened. "A wonder foo many lasses ye've tellt that till," she jeered.

"Elizabeth!" He made a clumsy rush, but she had slammed the gate.

"Wait for you!" Her voice, silvery and mocking, had sloughed the Doric. "I hope to do better for myself, thank you. I'm to be trained at Benholm, under Mistress Carnegie's own maid, and I'll have plenty of chances there. Do you suppose I'd wait, and grow old and ugly, on the chance of you making a fortune?"

This was all that passed between them. They had gone in together, parting wordlessly at their respective doors. Schooldays ended. She vanished into the mysterious, semi-sacred precincts of Benholm. He idled for a time, hung about the harbour, finally disappearing on a boat that halted at Sandhaven for some trivial repairs on its way to Sunderland with a cargo of wood. Mrs. Pert talked vaguely of her son's seafaring instincts, his love of the life. At intervals he sent her money, but, beyond a curt statement that he was "all right", he neither wrote nor returned.

III

In a life drab of episode, barren of events, save her marriage and her son's birth, Mrs. Pert, like a dying fire flaming up before its final extinction, experienced a few glorious, glowing weeks of undiluted, unmitigated triumph. For years she had lived beside a woman who made her feel her inferiority at every turn. For years that washing-green sundered and divided them. Mrs. Paton's successful, ladylike, creditable daughter was held up as model and rival to Mrs. Pert as the mother of an unsatisfactory and roving son. At the end, however, it was Mrs. Pert, the despised, the downtrodden, the under-dog, who rose up, the triumphant mother, the satisfied, the superior. She was old and widowed and worn-out when her son came home.

John, the slouching lad, the unsteady and sullen, this upright, keen-eyed, prosperous man! She could not believe it. He was first mate on the *Bella*, with good prospects of becoming captain. *Captain Pert*, she crooned the name over to herself. . . . John had money, as well as success. He crackled Treasury notes before her astonished gaze. What would she like? he demanded. He was going off on a longer voyage this time, and wanted to leave her comfortable before he went. Her dim eyes lit up. She had wild visions of staying with him at a Finhaven hotel, only to strangle these sternly. She must not prejudice his chances. Already he had hinted that his captain's daughter was interested in him. She trembled, then faltered out her dreams. Would John buy the cottage for her—and yon field? She'd like fine

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to die in her own house, and to have her drying-green to herself first.

John laughed and promised. For his week's stay she tasted bliss, pure and unadulterated. It was balm to reintroduce "my laddie" to the gaping village mothers who had prophesied, one and all, that "Mrs. Pert's Johnny" would end on the gallows. They had tea at the manse, John more than holding his own in conversation, his mother wearing a black satin from one of the best Aberdeen shops. Even the laird was interested and sympathetic. Mrs. Pert hoarded her golden moments, her hope approaching its realization, until the blow fell.

The cottage was not for sale. The owner was in an asylum, and it could not be disposed of until after his death. The utmost that John was able to secure for his mother was a lease of it for fifteen years, with a half-share of the drying-green. Mrs. Paton still reigned secure in her possession of the other half. John paid her a visit before he left, partly at the entreaty of his mother, desirous of showing off to her rival this creditable son, partly on his own account, to glean news of Elizabeth. She was abroad, he learned, as lady's maid to the youngest Miss Carnegie, now Mrs. Fullarton.

John did not mind. She had slipped from memory, the slim girl whom he had kissed in the windy darkness of an October night. He had kissed so many other girls since that her image was nebulous and dimmed. Mrs. Paton, that tremendous, overwhelming shadow in his mother's life, had shrunk and dwindled to a deaf and complaining old woman. On his return from seeing her John made a jesting

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request to his mother. She'd have to promise him to see Mrs. Paton out. Then, maybe, he'd be able to buy both cottages, knock 'em into one, and she'd enjoy her drying-green to herself. The gleam in her sunken eyes amazed him.

"Aye, that'd be fine, laddie. But"—her brow clouded—"it's no likely. A've had a hard life, an' her a saft ane. She'll live tae bury me."

"No her!" He laughed.

"Aye." She was stubborn in her dreary conviction. "But gin A'm deid, laddie, an' she, buy yon hoosies a' the same. When A'm in my grave, A'd like weel tae think that baith an' yon green was oors."

IV

Twenty years later John Pert came home for the second time.

News of his mother's death had reached him in Shanghai. It was several months before he could arrange his affairs satisfactorily and return to his native spot. At long intervals he had heard from his mother, every letter bringing the same tidings. The lunatic owner of the cottages and Mrs. Paton both lived, bidding fair to become centenarians. Mrs. Pert had died, beholding her dream unfulfilled a great way off. She would never live in a cottage which belonged to her, or have her drying-green to herself. A much lesser spot than either sufficed her now.

The place, save for its ludicrous smallness to eyes that had seen great cities and wide spaces, was oddly unchanged. John motored from Finhaven, and leav-

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ing his car at the top of the lane, went, a wealthy prodigal, first to the little cemetery, where with difficulty he found his mother's grave. He vowed, standing beside it, that she should have the biggest tombstone that money could buy, and her son at least should become owner of her coveted field and cottage. It was all that he could do for her now. Her last years had been comfortable, although she resolutely refused to leave the draughty, old-fashioned place which occasioned her such heartburnings. He walked down to it, smiling a little over her clinging to the same so tenaciously.

He saw a slender spiral of smoke wavering up from the near chimney. So old Mrs. Paton—she must be over seventy now—still lived there? He hated her for her power to peer behind the blinds whilst his mother's coffin was manœuvred out at the narrow door. He pushed the gate open, and, with its familiar whine in his ears, walked up to the first cottage.

No one answered his knock. After a few seconds he repeated it, impatiently, noisily. The sunshine—it was a bright day—fell upon his powerful figure as he stood there, a man of fifty, well-clad, prosperous, one who had fought for his own hand, and won. The place was very still. He heard the slow cluck and little noises of hens, a whistle from the railway, children screaming at their play in the village street. A queer sensation stole over him. It was as if his mother's spirit stood beside him, whispering in his ear, urging him not to desert her, to laugh aside her unsatisfied cravings and desire. His eyes went past a tall and ragged hollyhock, over the wall, beyond

the slanting housetops, to the sea. It glittered, blue and beckoning. He remembered the little boy who had lain awake on windy nights listening to its voice. He had heard that voice through his dreams in foreign lands. Well, he was back again, he, Johnny Pert, the village wastrel, now Captain Pert, the well-off, the independent. If money could buy them, these two cottages should become his. He thought that it was reverence for his mother's memory, this craving to carry out her last, her only wish. In reality, something of her insane, obsessing desire had passed into himself.

The door opened unexpectedly. It swung back, the narrow aperture framing a woman. He stared into her face, not recognizing her. A spare body, a withered, spectacled countenance, with thin hair brushed primly from a prematurely lined brow. "Is Mrs. Paton in?" he asked sheepishly. No doubt this was some neighbour who looked after the old woman. Her own daughter—she must be the same age as himself—was probably married long since.

"Mother's dead." Where had he heard that mincing, refined voice, that aping of gentility? Good heavens!

"Elizabeth!" he stammered.

She drew back. "I am Miss Paton. I'm afraid I don't remember——"

He broke in. "Div ye no mind Johnny Pert?"

Her face did not change, save to harden the merest trifle. "Oh! Your mother's dead too, I suppose you know?"

They stood looking at one another. The sunshine was very cruel to her fifty years.

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"Can I come ben?" He spoke awkwardly.

She led the way without a word. He remembered the Patons' cottage even in his childhood as twice as comfortable as his mother's. Now he was struck by its modest luxury—yes, that was the only word—its taste, its elegancies. Had Elizabeth inherited money? Her mother's slender pension—if continued to her—would hardly account for these amenities. She was not married, nor a widow. She had called herself "Miss Paton."

She motioned him to a chair. "I'm sorry I can't offer you anything to drink. I don't keep spirits in the house."

"Oh, that's all right." He remained standing, feeling awkward and enormous in the low-ceilinged room. "A'm—A'm sorry about your mither. Foo lang?"

"Three months." She looked down at her black dress.

"An' you stay here?"

"Yes."

"Are ye no lonely?"

She shook her head. •

His rough voice took a gentler note. "Ye're no merrit, Elizabeth?"

Again that slow movement of the lean neck and small head, with its primly braided hair.

"No. I'm not married."

He stared at her helplessly. "A'd hae thocht ye was merrit lang syne, or still wi' yon Carnegies."

"Oh, not since my accident," She held up her left hand, encased in a black silk glove. "Miss Cecilia—Mrs. Fullarton, I should say—upset a lamp

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in one of the Italian hotels, and I got pretty badly burned putting out the fire." She smiled faintly. "The laird says I saved her life, and the family can't do enough for me." Her smile deepened to a smirk. "I've been with mother this good while. She'd a long illness, and now I'm to have her pension, and another from Mr. Fullarton, and I'm always to and from the place—Benholm—when the family's there. Did you hear that the laird's bought this house for me?"

John could hardly believe his ears. "But—but it was no for sale?" he gasped.

"Oh, hasn't any one told you about Mr. Gascoigne?" Her thin smile was pitying. "He died six weeks ago, so the cottages were to be sold. Colonel Carnegie bought both, and made them over to me. I'm going to have them turned into one as soon as this builders' strike is over and we can get the workmen."

He looked at her, this lean, middle-aged woman, who had so effectually killed both his cherished dreams. Where was the soft-cheeked Elizabeth whom he had kissed in the dark thirty-four years ago? Where was his chance of buying field and cottages to appease his mother's memory? Lost by six weeks!

"The laird micht hae waited." He found himself stammering in his fury.

"He'd no idea where you were, and when your mother was dead you couldn't want them." Her voice sounded sharp and acid. "You can't live in them, and, as he said himself, it was only right that I should have a place of my own, after losing the use of my hand saving his daughter. What was more

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natural than that it should be my old home, my mother's house?" Her tones grew shrill.

John smiled grimly. The Carnegies would find out their mistake, establishing this cadging virago not far from their own gates. She was not the sort to let them forget the obligations which they owed her. And she loomed between him and the fulfilment of a desire now fast becoming an obsession.

The veins stood out on his flushed forehead. "A'll buy the place frae ye, Elizabeth."

"My name's Miss Paton, an' the cottage is no for sale." Unconsciously she dropped into the vernacular.

"A'll gie ye yer ain price. A'm no a poor man."

"It's not of any interest to me what your means are." She clutched the cloak of her gentility round her again. "I tell you, the place is not for sale."

The place! From her manner she might be referring to Benholm. "What did the laird pay for it?" He was dogged and determined.

Her eyelids dropped. "Eight hundred pounds, I believe, and he's giving me three more for the alterations and putting in electric light."

John choked. "A'll mak' it twelve hundred."

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "I don't want to have to tell you again that I am not selling my house."

He stood looking down at her. The window, framed in spotless muslin, was open. Through it came the drone of the sea. She was as obstinate, as immovable as the sharp-toothed rocks against which the sea beat, untiringly, uselessly. . . .

In his rage he said a brutal thing to her. "Ye juist

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want it because ye think ye'll get a lad, auld as ye are. Some chap tae hang up his hat——"

Her smile widened, showing her false teeth. "I'm quite happy by myself, thank you. Oh, you needn't think I haven't had offers. The head gardener at Benholm, and Mr. Fullarton's gentleman." She laughed. "You were sweet on me yourself once. You had the impudence to kiss me, a rough village boy like you!"

He writhed. She had defiled his golden moment, defaced his last memory of the Elizabeth who was gone. "A'll see the laird!" he threatened vaguely.

"Do." Her voice was silken.

He went out, without ceremony or farewell. The garden, no longer hen-haunted, sloped neat and gay. The poultry had been removed to the disputed drying-green, where their houses shone white and cared-for in the sunshine. Across the hard blue of the sky a thin, dark thing stretched. It was the ancient clothes-line, cause of continual heartburnings.

It was fifteen years before John Pert saw Sandhaven again.

In the interval he had further prospered, married, begotten children, and well-nigh ceased to remember the disputed cottage and Elizabeth Paton. He did his best at the time. The laird, the lawyer, the trustees of mad Mr. Gascoigne's property were all in turns interviewed, blustered at, brow-beaten, threatened, and abused. The last-named would have been glad to accept his offer of the higher price. The laird,

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secretly afraid of Elizabeth Paton, waveringly left the decision in her hands. She remained adamant. The cottage was now her own, and she intended to keep it. She declined to see Captain Pert again, and any offer in writing would be put in the fire. He left Sandhaven, wondering which was the greater—his hatred of her, or his desire to dispossess her.

On a September night, fifteen years later, his ship put in at Finhaven Harbour. Her stay was brief, but her crew for their few hours' liberty scattered gladly about the little town. Captain Pert, a trifle stouter, otherwise unchanged, strolled up from the harbour, and looked around him with amused eyes. In his boyhood a day in Finhaven, with its quiet streets and simple shops, its quay and ships, so much finer than anything at Sandhaven, had been a foretaste of Paradise. Now all was dwindled, lessened, provincial, slow. He turned into the Salutation Inn for a drink. The east-wind, haar-laden, coming up from the Basin, had chilled him, reminding him of incipient rheumatism. He was not getting any younger. He had a bonny wife, a pretty daughter, fine boys, and ample means on which to retire. The last time he was home his wife had hinted strongly that she wanted her man beside her. The children were growing up, requiring a father's hand and authority. Yes, he would forsake the sea, and enjoy his leisure and ease. At sixty-five a man needed a home for himself, and peace and relaxation.

A name, passing between two farmers who were exchanging drinks and gossip, caught his attention. Sandhaven! He looked up sharply. The mention of the old place had stirred his pulses. "Talking of

Sandhaven?" he asked them. "I'm a Sandhaven man myself." The Doric had slipped from him in the years of wandering. "How's things there?"

"Oh, nae sae bad. A've a fairm mysel' 'atween Bush and Sandhaven." The speaker looked with careless interest at the grizzled sea captain. "Aye, it's a great place for seafarin' folk. Mistress Carnegie's deid. Ye'll mebbe mind her, the laird's leddy at Benholm?"

He remembered Benholm. It had awed him in the old days. Mrs. Carnegie, driving past, had been his ideal of a royal queen. Another name stirred in the burned-down ashes of old memories. "I mind folks called Paton," he said slowly. "Any living still?"

The two farmers exchanged winks and laughs. "There's ane—she's eneuch. Auld Elizabeth—likes tae be ca'ed Miss Paton. She'd like fine tae be Mistress Carnegie, an' dod! A'd no be surprised gin she managed it yet. The laird's owre eighty."

In the low-ceilinged, smoke-grimed room, foggy with tobacco rings, fuggy from ale, Captain Pert heard the whole story. Elizabeth Paton had grown insatiable in her demands upon the Carnegies. She visited them, no longer as a former valued dependant, but as an equal. She took money, privileges, repairs to her house from them as freely as she accepted their garden produce and coal. They bowed meekly to her blood-sucking. It was whispered in the neighbourhood that she levied a species of ladylike blackmail. The story of the overturned lamp and her gallant rescue of Cecilia Fullarton were skilled fictions. Mr. Fullarton, extremely drunk, had made

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amorous advances to his wife's maid, in the virginal repelling of which they upset the lamp between them. Elizabeth valued her damaged hand, and the Carnegies valued Mr. Fullarton's damaged reputation. She had been the secret terror of their lives. Her sinister nearness, her unabashed requests, had driven Mrs. Carnegie into her grave, and it was freely rumoured that Elizabeth was set upon becoming her successor. Captain Pert chuckled, nodded, swallowed his ale, and after standing drinks all round, departed in a general atmosphere of beery benediction.

In spirit he had dropped the last fifteen years. He was once more the man of fifty, impotent in the knowledge that his money could not buy him the one thing which he coveted. That infernal woman! He ground his teeth at the thought of her. How she had prospered, fastening herself, leech-like, upon this unfortunate family, who had been her mother's benefactors. He recalled her, smug and sallow, the black glove upon her damaged hand symbol of her black heart. A desire suddenly seized him to see her again.

He knew that they would not sail until the morning. It was barely seven o'clock now. In the High Street, cobbled, unchanged, he squeezed his bulk into the last seat in a crowded, mud-splashed motor bus, and was soon jolting through the familiar landscape. There was the old tollhouse at the crossroads, and further along, the woods and wide fields and distant glimpses of the sea. They drove across the great bridge spanning the Esk, the shore, a misty curve, below and beyond. The road ran up and tilted down. They dropped passengers at solitary farms and cottages, or took up others. The sky was deep and

brooding, and the country darkening for the night. A wind blew across the fields, rough and empty after the ingathering of a late harvest. Ahead he saw the steeple and tall outline of Kirkside Church.

The bus dropped him at the top of the lane running down to Sandhaven. It was eight o'clock, and nearly dark. He glanced at the locked gate of the cemetery as he passed, and strode on. At the junction of the ways he halted, peering up at the cottage-end silhouetted against the sky. There was a tiny window set high up in it, and he saw with satisfaction that a stone had evidently been aimed, shattering the glass. No doubt the laird would have the privilege of putting in a new pane.

Captain Pert watched the house for a long time. Then he turned, very leisurely, and retraced his steps. He would walk back to Kirkdale, get a snack at the inn, and if he found that he had missed the last bus returning to Finhaven, would hire a taxi. . . .

He walked slowly, not because he was tired, but because something seemed to drag him back at every yard. Hate—monstrous, malignant, obsessing—obliterated all other feeling. He told himself impatiently that it was absurd to wish to injure a woman whom he had not seen for fifteen years, and scarcely thought of during their passing. What urged him to return, to have sight of her, to speak with her face to face? The motionless fields fell behind him as he tramped on doggedly. He was no longer Captain Pert of the *Merry Maid*, the husband of a pleasant, well-dowered wife, the father of three children, the idol of his crew. He was Johnny Pert again, the lout whom Elizabeth Paton had mocked in the dark lane,

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the man whom she had baulked of his desire for four walls and a plot of land. She was there alone, defenceless, too unpopular in the village, he shrewdly surmised, for any to come to her aid were a cry heard from her cottage. Its surrounding darkness had struck him, and he suddenly remembered noticing that the lamp, against the wall, was gone. Long afterwards he learned that she had complained about it as unnecessary and unsightly, insisting upon its being removed. It was nothing to her if half the villagers broke their legs groping towards the houses and the quay.

He saw the lights of Kirkside pricking the darkness ahead as he plodded up a long rise. He supposed irritably that he should find the inn shut. Ten o'clock had chimed from the high steeple when he was a quarter of a mile from the village. He'd have to tramp the length to Finhaven, if he did not want to miss his ship, unless a passing motorist overtook him and gave him a lift. It was too late for a train, or any tradesmen's carts calling at the intervening villages.

He came through Kirkside, with its forge, its solitary shop, its modest post office. He passed the inn, like these others inhospitably curtained and shut. Further along, a line of stuffy little cottages bordered the road. He saw a light glimmering behind a sun-bleached blind in the last window. It was a tiny general store, and his hand, incredulous of the chance of finding it open so late, lifted the old-fashioned latch.

The place was dark and confused, crowded with packing-cases, dusty, half-empty boxes, derelict tins. A smell of sawdust and cheese hung in the air. An

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old woman came forward from some mysterious inner premises, peering and blinking. He bought a packet of biscuits, and, whilst she wrapped them up, took out his tobacco pouch and refilled his pipe.

"A braw nicht." She handed him the little bag.

"Aye. No bus to Finhaven, I suppose?"

"No till the morn's morn. The last gangs by about six." She scrutinized him, idly curious. "Ye're no frae hereabouts?" she asked.

He was suddenly cautious. "No." He handed her a coin. "Got change? Sorry I've nothing smaller."

The old woman examined it critically. "The licht's no verra guid, nor my eyes. Is yon a florin noo, or a hauf-croon?"

He was anxious to be gone. "A florin. I think you said the biscuits'd be sixpence."

She dropped the coin into a tin box, from whence she extracted a battered shilling and six worn pennies. He thanked her and went out, unceremoniously cutting short her interminable tale of how it was early closing, but the Kirkside policeman winked at her keeping open on Thursdays. It brought a little custom, especially in the tourist season, when people looked in to buy chocolates and picture postcards. All the villages up the coast had Thursday for their half-holiday, but it was Wednesday in Finhaven. He muttered "Yes, yes" impatiently, and went.

Outside, it was quite dark, with a wind blowing in from the sea.

He walked irresolutely to the top of the road, stood about, turned. Steadily, unfalteringly, unweariedly, he took the miles that he had already trodden. An

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unlighted house was before him, a house shorn of its protecting, revealing lamp, and in the house there slept a woman whom he hated. It was nearly midnight when he stood once again beside his Naboth's vineyard.

The gate in the wall yielded to his touch. It whined as if in protest as he swung it back. He remembered every inch of the place, and groped his way unhesitatingly round to the far side of the house. The drying-green was a drying-green no longer, but his hand encountered a sodden knot of fibre twined about the same rusty hook in the wall. With his stout jack-knife he hacked off the dangling, rain-saturated length of rope remaining.

Miss Paton had no fear of midnight marauders apparently, for he found it ludicrously easy to push up the low, unlatched window, and effect an entrance. He stood listening. The house—once two cottages—was naturally less familiar than the garden, and he wondered suddenly where she slept, or if she had servant or neighbour for company. As he pondered, feeding his hate on half-submerged memories, awakened by the sight of these, his boyhood's surroundings, he heard a door open.

The gaunt and scraggy figure in the nightdress had not time even for cry or prayer before he flung himself upon her, bearing her to the ground.

VI

The Sandhaven murder passed into the category of unsolved crimes. In Sandhaven itself it was the chief topic of interest for months, and the house in which Elizabeth Paton had lived many years, and

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been found strangled with a piece of rope from her own drying-green, was displayed delightedly to inquiring visitors. No clue could be discovered as to her murderer. A few grains of strong tobacco, dropped from pipe or pocket during the brief struggle, pointed to a man, possibly a seafaring man, but that was all. She was not popular in the village, yet no one was known to have had such an active grudge against her as to go the length of taking her life. Robbery was not the motive for the deed. Nothing in the cottage had been touched or disturbed, and she had plenty worth a thief's appropriating. There were indications in the rough ground behind the cottage that the murderer had endeavoured to dig a shallow grave amongst the rubble and stones in which to hide his night's work, but by the time that the police arrived the place had been explored and tramped over by half the village, whose boots obliterated the original footmarks, had any remained. Elizabeth Paton had not been seen talking to any stranger. She was in the village, buying stamps at the post office, on the evening of her death, and had appeared well and cheerful. Her daily servant had left her at six o'clock, aware of her intention of going into Finhaven next day for some shopping. She had made out a list of the articles that she intended to purchase, which was afterwards found in her bureau, but the only things that she subsequently required—a shroud and a coffin—were not amongst these. She was buried beside her father and mother, and would no doubt have appreciated the large concourse assembled to watch her murdered body lowered to its last home.

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Six months later Captain Pert, now retired and living at Weymouth, chanced to be paying a visit to his wife's people, who lived in Aberdeen. Wrapped round some fish, he noticed a copy of the *Finhaven Review*. He rescued the sodden sheet and read it, out of curiosity. There was nothing in it to interest him until he came to the advertisements, and saw—"Desirable Freehold Cottage for Sale at Sandhaven.

"The Dwelling-house, known as Benholm Cottage, Sandhaven, to be sold by public roup on Friday first, April 12th, consisting of two Public, three Bedrooms, Bathroom (h. and c.), Kitchen, Scullery, etc. Good Garden and Drying-green. Immediate entry. Property in excellent repair. Low Feu-duty. For further particulars apply to Burness and Christison, Solicitors, Bridge Street, Finhaven."

Captain Pert pondered. No doubt the place had a sinister reputation since a certain happening within its walls on a dark September night. His heavy-jowled face set itself into lines of sudden resolve. He would go to Sandhaven, buy the cottage, and once it was his, pull it down, stone by stone. His old dream was bidding fair to be fulfilled. He was to become the owner of the disputed drying-green at last.

A week later the express from Aberdeen ran smoothly parallel with the long platform of Finhaven station. It was a day of high winds, with sudden squalls of rain, out of a sky alternately brilliantly blue and sombrely grey. Captain Pert alighted, gave up his ticket (afterwards a predominant feeling in his mind was annoyance at having flung away for nothing the price of the return half), and crossed over to the

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siding where the dingy little local train waited. It was more crowded than usual. Curiosity, morbid interest, the desire to be present at the epilogue to the tragedy, evidently were taking people, who had no intention of buying it, to see the house sold. He recognized no faces that he knew, and settled down in his corner behind a newspaper.

The April fields were green and windy. The railway line ran along the cliff top, with the shore curving far below, and the sea dancing beyond the rocks. The roofs and outlines of the solitary farms that the train passed, dotted about the countryside, were sharp and clear-cut in the keen, salty air. Everywhere ploughing was in progress. The smell of the turned earth, and a lark's lessening singing, came in at the carriage window. The stations slid past—Northesk Bridge, Kirkside, Bush, Berbie, Sandhaven. He stepped out on to the little platform, with its smell of salt and tar from the harbour, and the first daffodils, pale and brave, just beginning to show in the black mounds that broke the green banks framing the twin gleaming rails. He made his way slowly, a unit in a grimly excited crowd, down the road, muddy and rutty, to where the chimneys of the cottage stood stark against the sky.

The furniture and effects had been removed and disposed of privately. An empty shell, the house itself kept its grim secret to itself. He wandered over it, re-living, though his dour, tanned face betrayed no signs of it, that night. Here was the doorway which had framed her, her scraggy neck and withered face in ludicrous, pitiable contrast to the nainsook and embroidery of the girlish nightdress. Here was the

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very spot where the lean body had lain. He went out, expecting somehow to meet her. Dully he began to wonder what had brought him back here, to this house of grisly remembrance, of ugly ghosts that refused to be laid. Who said that murderers were always, in the end, forced to return to the scene of their crime, unwilling, unrepentant, goaded? He laughed in his trim beard to think how impossible was the chance of discovery and identification in his case. No one had seen him, coming or going. He had walked back the black miles without meeting a solitary soul, and sailed with his ship next morning. The only thing that worried him was the loss of his tobacco pouch. He had missed it suddenly during that dark return tramp to Finhaven, and memory refused obstinately to aid him to think where he could have left it. Was it in the Salutation Inn? No, for he recalled refilling his pipe from it on the bus. Was it in the little shop when he was buying the biscuits? He could not tell. Was it—O agonizing thought—in the room where the body lay? Had he dropped it there, or in the garden, or on the drying-green? It bore his name in roughly inked letters under the flap, but, if found, there must be other John Perts. He had not dared to advertize for it. As weeks went by he came to the conclusion that he must have lost it on the road, and whoever picked it up considered it too valueless to hand to the police. It was as well that they had not done so, after that discovery of the scattered grains of tobacco near the body. . . .

He stood idly about the neglected little garden. Sightseers had tried their best to trample it down, but a few springing things, rank and straggling, were

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pushing their heads above the dark earth. In the drying-green, empty of poultry, the grass was long and tangled. He noticed, still fastened by a sodden lump round the hook in the wall, the remains of the rope that he had hacked the end from that night. A solitary star had watched him as he sawed doggedly through the fraying strands. . . .

He saw that the loitering crowd of curiosity-mongers were massing before the windows. The sale must be about to begin. He joined them, and shrugging his broad shoulders at the keen, sunless wind, stood listening idly to the auctioneer's persuasive patter. In spite of his insistence upon the attractions and superiority of the house, the answering bids were reluctant, few, and low. A man beside Captain Pert turned to him.

"Are ye for buyin'?" he asked.

"Maybe." The other shrugged his shoulders again.

"Ye'll get a bargain, as far as yon hoosie gangs." The speaker lowered his voice. "But gin ye're a stranger, it's no fair no tae tell ye that there's a story about yon." He nodded towards the cottage.

Captain Pert had an odd illusion that the place was watching him, waiting to pounce upon him. The chimneys were like an animal's ears. He could fancy them flattened, laid back, as the creature gathered for a spring. . . .

"Aye?" he queried, with vague civility.

"The woman—a spinster body—wha stayed here, she was murdered last September." None knew this better than Captain Pert, but he merely nodded. "Found strangled with a bit of rope frae her ain drying-green." He jerked his head to indicate.

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"And who did it?" Captain Pert stared at the blank windows, which stared stolidly back.

"Naebody kens. She wasna juist verra well liket hereaboots, but she'd nae enemies. Naething was tuk', an' they found nae footprints. Ye wouldna think a wee, quiet place the like o' yon would hae a murder in it, would ye?"

Bids had gone up slowly to five hundred and twenty pounds. There was a pause. Captain Pert, breaking from his garrulous acquaintance, stepped forward and offered six hundred. He had forgotten everything but that the laird had paid eight hundred for the place, and repairs and alterations had swallowed up another three. Could his mother and his enemy but be alive to witness this belated triumph! There was a little further chaffering, ending in capitulation and congratulations. He wrote a cheque then and there, the sharp wind fluttering the leaves of the cheque book as his fountain pen travelled across the page. The auctioneer scrutinized it. "Pert? Yon's a Sandhaven name," he remarked.

Captain Pert was anxious to be gone. He made his way quickly through the still lingering groups of people. All the faces were strange to him, and his equally, it seemed, to them. A few words of sly chaff about his "guid bargain", and inquiries as to whether he intended to live in the house himself, he answered by a curt nod or head-shake. He had a driving feeling that he must leave the sinister place behind, or it would run after him, overtake him. . . .

Heads oscillated in eager conference after his departure. What was the name of the man who had bought the property? Captain Pert. Aye, weel, a

WINIFRED DUKE

Mrs. Pert and her son Johnny used to stay in the end cottage, years past, when it was two houses. He'd done grandly at sea, and tried to buy the cottages after Elizabeth Paton got them from the laird. He was fair mad when she refused to sell. Auld sweethearts? No them! Hated him, and used to say so.

Captain Pert, on his way to the inn to inquire about a conveyance to take him to Finhaven, found a small boy pattering after him. He turned and waited. The boy panted—"The auctioneer says wull ye please come back? Something about an address."

He went, oddly reluctant to face the garden and the crowd again. As he swung back the gate, the familiar creak and whine reminding him of its attenuated, long-drawn scream that had followed him up the hill that night (for he had not dared to risk returning and closing it properly), an old woman detached herself from a group of others, and made towards him.

"Eh, but I'm glad tae see ye," she exclaimed. She detained him by a skinny hand on his thick sleeve. "Div ye no mind leavin' yet tobacco pouch in my shop six months past? It was the verra nicht the puir body here was murdered." She nodded towards the cottage. "A've got it lockit up safe——"

In his relief, his confusion, he stammered out a fatal admission. "Yes, I missed it, but I thought I'd dropped it here. It's all right as you have it. Keep it. I don't want it. It's of no value."

He finished his business—a trivial, overlooked detail—with the auctioneer, and went. People stared after him. He fancied that they fell away from him.

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The old woman had not rejoined her companions. She was talking eagerly to a tall man, the village police constable off duty. Presently he detached himself from her and came quickly up the hill after Captain Pert.

BY
JOHN RESSICH



“SCOTS WHA HAE”

He is retired, to ripe his growing fortunes, to Scotland, and concludes in hearty prayers.

Henry IV.

THE “VICTORY”. Grand National had been run and that great horse, Poethlyn, had carried the top weight to victory with consummate ease. The Liverpool hotel smoking-room was packed with hot, flushed, strident-voiced sporting men—which is not quite the same thing as sportsmen—and the waiters never knew an idle moment.

In the corner farthest from the door a little coterie of sycophants surrounded The Nabob. Coarse, swollen and unlovely, his overdressed appearance and fine linen striking a painful note in contrast to his unwashed paws, there was yet that in the man’s shaven face which arrested the attention, and made one think of Tammany bosses, who, going over, through, or under, seldom failed to reach the other side safely.

A prominent “layer,” the deference of his cronies was their outward testimony to his success—your professional racing gentleman wastes no time paying court to failures. Although the favourite had won

"SCOTS WHA HAE"

the big race, he had had a good day and was graciously pleased to unbend in reminiscence.

"Wonder wye you never does the Scotch meetings, George?" remarked one of the circle, and was proceeding to explain his reason for wondering when simultaneous kicks landing on his ankles from his immediate neighbours, and the deepening scowl on the face of George, otherwise known as The Nabob, made him, literally, painfully aware that he had dropped a brick.

"If I thought you was tryin' to come it on me, me lad," growled the big man slowly, when he was interrupted by a chorus of apologetic assurances. Mollified, The Nabob noisily finished his drink, drew the back of his hand across his mouth and grabbed a passing waiter. "Same again all round, an' bring the cigars," he called.

His august health having been drunk, by no one with more fervour than the unhappy questioner, who, under cover of the waiter's arrival with his well-laden tray, was fiercely cursed *sotto voce* by the others, fearing an untimely stoppage of their host's bounty, The Nabob settled himself in his chair, sucked heavily at his cigar and, in a voice hoarse with years of shouting and rich living, began impressively: "I've only bin in Scotland oncet—an' that's round twenty year ago. I've never bin back since, but swelp me gawd, if ever I do go, it'll be to commit murder. 'Owsomever, as you, me lad, don't seem to know yer 'istory, I don't mind lettin' yer 'ave the facts, as a warnin'.

"Me an' Bert Fryer, wot none on ye won't remember as——"

"Yoong Bert Fryer!" exclaimed one of his audi-

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ence. "Wye, ah moind on 'im w'en 'e wor a yoong laad: 'e wor born not a 'oondred yaards from w'ere ah lived woon toime i' Oodersfeald, an'——"

"Oh, shut yer face, yer blinkin' Sheffielder," blared The Nabob angrily. "'Oo in 'ell wants ter 'ear yew?"

For a second an ugly gleam showed in the assailed one's eyes, and for another second he thought of plashing his drink in the overbearing bully's face, but the earliest lesson your racing parasite learns is the futility of yielding to impulse. After all, he reflected, racing has its ups and downs: his turn might come, so he mumbled an apology and George took up his tale afresh.

"Yes, as I was sayin', me an' Bert 'ad bin workin' the northern meetings that autumn, 'im doin' the clerkin' an' goin' 'alves in the book, an' not 'avin' bin doin' too well, we decides to go on wiv some o' the crowd as was goin' to that there land of 'ope and glory, an' tearin' a bit off the natives. We starts at Ayr and gets broke right off the reel, one favrit after another rollin' up. Yes, me an' Bert fairly gets it in the neck at Ayr, but we borrows enough to open the book again at Paisley an' sorter 'eld our own there. Then we goes on to a place they calls Lanarick or some such, but lor! they was bettin' in thrippenny bits *there*, so we finally lands at Musselburgh sufferin' sore from financial cramp.

"Musselburgh! Blimey, to this day it gives me a pain inside if I as much as *sees* a mussel, an' fer years the sight of a whelk-barrer fair turned me sick. Yer knows the place most on yer: wot they calls a prosp'rous fishin' town, outside Edinburgh, wiv the

"SCOTS WHA HAE"

track runnin' round a golf course on the shore an' ouses at the near end.

"Well, me an' Bert manages to raise a bit more an' takes up our pitch in the silver ring. But lor! when yer luck's out it's *hout*, an' that's all there's to it, an' each race leaves me an' Bert worse an' worse, till, when the second last race was run, we was cleaned out proper. I was fer borrowin' a quid from 'Arry Bates an' goin' straight back to Edinburgh an' drinkin' meself silly, but Bert wouldn't 'ave it. So 'e unfolds 'is little scheme, an' many a time that day I wished I'd choked 'im instead o' listenin' to 'im.

"We was oppersit the grand stand and the ring across the track, an' back of us was the small stand, an' back o' that again was a long row o' layers bettin' in rags, bones an' drippin' wiv the simple an' unserfisticated native. So Bert's bright idea was as we should 'ump the box right down to the end o' this row, which stretched diagonal across the course nearly touchin' the rails on that side.

"There was only two runners in the last race, an' as Tommy Augood was ridin' one, which was pretty certain to be favrit, we was to lay the outsider all ends up, wotever we could get 'em to take an' chance it, Bert arguin' that if so as it didn't come off, we'd be runnin' away from their 'appy 'omes, an' them flounder-footed mussel-catchers wouldn't be like to foller us far. Now, Bert could move a bit, an' as I could leg it a bit meself in them days, I gives in."

"Ah, you wor aalways pooty good aal round, George," said the persistent gentleman from Sheffield, in a praiseworthy endeavour to recover the market.

JOHN RESSIGH

"There wasn't much I couldn't 'andle in me young days," said the gratified ex-athlete. "Touch the bell."

A harassed waiter having done his part, The Nabob resumed:

"Well, along we goes, an', as I thought, little Tommy's mount was favrit. Five to one they was layin' in the ring against the other, an' we was givin' the locals up to *tens*; pretty soon we 'ad as much in the satchel as would 'ave 'eld down a balloon, but wot worried *me* was that as they brassed up their bobs an' arf-dollars they stopped wiv us. Just 'ung round starin' wiv their 'ands in them cross-cut britches' pockets as they uses, an' there they stands.

"Wot bewties they was! Great 'ulking brewts, all cheek-bones an' feet—an' wot feet! Like them foldin'-down beds as we uster git in the cheap dosses at the Brighton meetin's.

"Well, there we was an' there *they* was. When the 'osses starts an' come round be'ind us, I sees the outsider was only canterin', an' I looks at Bert, an' Bert looks at me, an' I sees somethin' desprit 'as got to be done. So I passes a wink to 'im, an' just as they was comin' up the straight together I starts a cry, 'The favrit wins! The favrit wins! A skinner! I never laid it!' and Bert, who was damn quick to pick anything up, 'e turns an' grabs me fist, shoutin', 'Well done, George!'

"So this seems to 'urt the feelin's o' them yokels, an' they clusters together an' sorter moves towards the winnin' post. Not as they 'ad an earthly o' gettin' there, but bein' that damn greedy, they was edgin'

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up to where they thought the scene o' their misfortunes was, so to speak.

"Wiv that I passes the satchel quite slow an' confident to Bert, 'im bein', as I've said, pretty 'ot stuff at sprintin', an' just as we could see the two caps bobbin' past the post over the 'eads o' the crowd, the outsider winnin' easy—we 'ops it.

"We gets a bit of a start before them Johnnie-raws spots wot's 'appened; then they lets out one despairin' 'owl an' comes after us. Straight down this 'ere links, as they calls it, we runs, an' after their first 'owl, them 'eathens never gives tongue. Gawd! I can feel it all yet. When we was runnin', I remembered one o' Spikey Nurton's yarns—'im as was up at Klondyke—about them 'there timber-wolves 'untin' in packs, an' runnin' mute, as 'e put it. It 'elped *me* along a yard or two that rekerlekshun did, I can tell yer. An' thinkin' on wolves an' things an' lookin' apprehensive over me shoulder, I never notices a great yawnin' sand-'ole till I falls slap inter it. One o' them places where they puts them as is learnin' this golf business, so as they won't 'arm nobody, an' 'ead over 'eels in I tumbles, Bert, 'avin' seen it in time, swingin' round by the end. Through it I goes, wiv 'underweights o' sand in me eyes an' me boots an' down me collar, an' be sugared if the far side of it wasn't lined wiv railway sleepers on end. Wot a country!

"'Owsomever, I realizes as I'm running fer me life, so over I scrambles some'ow, and as them blinkin' savages 'ad 'ad to come round the end, same as Bert, we 'ad still a bit in 'and. Keepin' together, we ducks under the rail, crosses the track, ducks under

the other, an' on we runs wiv not a sound from them feroshus 'eather-Jocks bar the clumpin' o' their feet—an' I've told yer wot *they* was like.

"On we sprints, increasin' our lead 'andsome, an' feelin' we was goin' to bring it off, when out o' the ground from nowhere springs two young blighters wiv no 'ats, bare knees, an' red stockin's. 'Take 'im low, Hughiel' sings out one, an' wiv that the other, a ginger-'eaded little devil, makes a flyin' dive at Bert's legs, an' the pair on 'em does a regular catherine-wheel. The satchel bursts open, an' our 'ard-earned spondulicks goes buzzin' all over the place.

"An 'arf-dollar catches me in the eye, just as the other limb o' Satan plays the cop-'im-low touch on me, but I sees wot 'as 'appened to Bert, so I swerves an' catches 'im a back'ander. Just as I done that I trips over a rock, an' goes swoosh all me length in the sea, rippin' the seat and 'arf one o' the legs out o' me trousers. I struggles to me knees, coughin' up pints an' pints o' nasty salt water, an' I'd just found me feet, 'oldin' on to wot was left o' me trousers, when a lump o' turf as big as a steak-an'-kidney puddin' gets me fair on the side o' me 'ead, an' bowls me over again. I gets up, proper ragin' mad, an' was just makin' a rush at this young swine when I realizes that the crowd as 'ad come up wasn't goin' to 'ave *that*. One 'arf o' them murderin' 'Ottentots was pullin' pore old Bert to ribbons an' pickin' up our money, an' the other 'arf comes along the shore, tearin' it up by the roots an' 'eavin' it at me, led on by this young blighter wiv no 'at. Stones an' turf an' them flat bottles which all them 'eathens puts in their 'ip pockets regular of a mornin', same as the Dook

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Portland 'ud say to 'is valley: 'Fill me cigar-case.' "

"But wot *was* they, George?" asked one horrified listener.

"Oh, I found out after wot they was, all right," answered The Nabob. "There's a wicked old man in them parts as runs a semingnary fer young toffs. 'E trains 'em special to go about wiv their 'eads an' their knees an' gawd knows wot else bare: feeds 'em on iron filings an' other strengthenin' foods, an' turns 'em out as big as men an' strong as bull calves. An' them two, instead o' being indoors nice an' proper, doin' their little sums an' writin' up their copy-books, 'ad sneaked out to see the racin', an', out o' pure cussedness, interferes wiv me an' Bert, just as we—— Oh, dammit! touch that bell," and overcome by the recollection, he spat fiercely and drained his glass.

The waiter having filled in the pause, he continued:

"Every time I tries to get ashore they starts volleyin' at me. Forchinate the water wasn't deep, so I could get outer range wivout 'avin to swim, which I can't do, but, gostrewth! think of it. Me best pal murdered before me very eyes by them cannibals: me up to me middle in the sea wiv 'arf me trousers gone an' bung full o' sand an' sickenin' salt water, an' no prospect o' gettin' out wiv 'undreds an' 'undreds of 'em waitin' to kill me.

"Owsomever, I couldn't *live* there, so I starts to move on a bit, but blimey! if they didn't follow me up. Twicet I pitches into 'oles an' goes over me 'ead, them reptiles cheerin' like 'ell each time. Wot

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a country! Well, this goes on, me working' along the beach, an' after it come down darkish they petered off, an' I gets ashore 'arf dead, among some rocks an' 'ouses, 'avin' come right the 'ole length o' the course in the water.

"Perishin' wiv cold, I sets down where I can't be seen an' takes stock o' the situation, so to speak. I was examinin' me rewined trousers when I spots a pair 'angin' up on a rope in a backyard sort o' place. Well, thinks I, that's a start, anyhow, an' as soon as it was proper dark I nips in an' 'as 'em, an' drags 'em on over me own. Strike me lucky if I don't think they must 'ave bin made fer a blinkin' elephant. 'Owsomever, they covered me, an' I feels better already."

"Ah, you wor aalways a good-plooked 'un, George," chipped in the determined Sheffielder.

"Well, anyhow, I 'ad to get a move on, but I was fair dyin' fer just—one—drink. Of course I 'adn't a bean, but creepin' along in the shadows, the streets bein' quiet, I spots a nice little pub. I looks in—empty, an' only a lad in charge, rubbin' up some glasses. I knew 'e couldn't leave the place, so in I goes. 'Evenin', matey,' I sez, as 'earty-like as I could on me diet o' sand an' salts, 'glass o' whisky,' makin' believe to dive fer me pocket wiv the 'and as wasn't 'oldin' up the yards o' the slack o' me pants. 'E looks funny-like at me, but sets down the drink, which I grabs an' tosses off neat. Fair scorched me throat, it did, but I can feel the effect o' that life-savin' drink now. Then I gathers 'e's sayin' somethin', though 'Eavin know wot gibberish 'e was gettin' rid of."

"It's a dialec' them Scotties speaks, same as the

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Maoris an' that lot," said a travelled member of his audience.

"P'raps you're right, but I wasn't stoppin' there long enough to learn it. I sees it was up to me to make a quick get-away, so I turns round an' pretends to spot some pals through the glass door—starts an imaginary conversation through the door which I 'arf opened, then slips out an' runs like 'ell, 'oldin' me pants in me two 'ands. I did 'ear the pore lad callin' out doleful, but I knew as 'e couldn't leave the place, so I gets away safe over a bridge. Still keepin' in the shadows, I soon gets clear o' the blasted death-trap. I sees lights ahead: miles an' miles ahead. I wasn't sure of me direction, but as it was suicide to try the railway station I trudges on in the dark. I passes dwellin'-'ouses now an' then, but by keepin' well down by the shore I gets through all right. Then I passes a pier like Brighton, but nothin' lookin' like Edinburgh. Finally I strikes a road wot didn't seem to 'ave no beginnin' nor no end, wiv no lamps, an' 'undreds an' thousands o' rats squealin' all over the place an' me alone. Proper terrified I was, I give yer me word, but the thought o' them cannibals behind pushed me on. I crosses a railway line an' presently strikes streets again. I passes one or two likely pubs, but on poppin' me 'ead in I sees it wasn't no place fer me—crowded to the door they was wiv people singin' an' fightin', so I drags on me weary way till I comes to a bit o' grass an' a flag-pole an two or three streets convergin', the place as lively as a cemetery, that quiet it was. I sets down on a doorstep, an' when a rozzer comes up I was that done in, I didn't try to get away.

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" 'E considers me fer a bit, turnin' 'is lantern on me, then 'e starts 'is gibberish. 'Wor did ye git they claze,' was wot 'e sez, an' I can remember it word fer word now, fer 'e kep' on repeatin' of it, but wot in 'ell 'e meant fair beat me, till 'e starts 'andlin' me 'orrible britches, then I rumbles. I starts pitchin' a tale about 'avin' bin shipwrecked, when swelp me 'e turns 'is lantern off an' starts laughin'. I must 'ave bin a sight too, but imagine a Scotchman seein' a joke. So we gets matey, as far as people speakin' different langwidges can, an' I sez, 'Friends—Edinburgh.' 'Oh, Edinburry?' 'e sez, an' 'e starts explainin' an' pointin', an' I gathers 'e's tellin' me where it lays an' that I've gotter take a tram car—'caw'r' 'e called it—an' may I die, when I gets 'im ter understand as I'm stony broke, if 'e doesn't shake out a deuce o' browns an' 'ands 'em over still chucklin'. That's somethin' to remember, a blinkin' Scotchman givin' away money.

"Presently I sees an antidelooonian bus shovin' a pair o' crocks along the rails in the middle o' the street, so on I gets, an' not desirin' much attention, I goes outside an' sets there 'shiverin', an' cursin' me luck, an' thinkin' about pore Bert, an' all the while we goes miles an' miles up a great damn 'ill wiv 'undreds o' pubs on both sides o' this everlastin' street, which was crowded wiv people fightin' an' singin'. *Wot* a country!

"After stoppin' a few times to take out the 'arf-dead nags an' 'itch on more, we reaches the top, doin' the last 'arf-mile at a walk—an' me dyin' wiv cold. Then I reckernises the Register 'Ouse, an' I knew as I'd find me pals at the little club at the

back, but the trouble was 'ow to get there. There was millions an' millions more people about, all drunk an' all singin' an' fightin', so I 'opes to slip through wivout attractin' much notice to meself—but nothin' doin'. A couple o' newsboys spots me an' starts a tallyo, an' in 'arf-a-mo' we 'as a crowd round like an execution, an' me playin' principal boy. A couple of rozzers comes through an' grabs me, an' was just marchin' me off, when up comes Danny Sullivan. Wot 'e said or done I dunno, but 'e was always smart enough to whisper the fleas off a dog's ear, so 'e gets me away, chokin' wiv laughin', an' shoves me in a quiet doorway.

"'George,' sez 'e, shakin' all over like a lump o' potted meat, 'wot's 'appened?' So I tells 'im, brief. 'George,' sez 'e, fishin' out a bundle o' them Scotch notes, an' peelin' off five, 'there's a fiver, straight, if you'll come up to the club an' let the boys see yer *as you are*.' Well, I was tryin' to go there anyway, so I reckon that was me first bit o' luck. Up 'e 'elps me, an' never in me life did I 'ear such a scream o' laughter as went up when I goes in. Nobody 'adn't 'eard anything o' pore Bert, so I'd given 'im up, when I runs across 'im at Gosforth Park a bit later, lookin' the pictur' o' misery in a suit 'e'd borrowed, which was three sizes too big. 'E 'ad a face like a rainbow, 'is left arm in a sling, an' 'im limpin' about, leanin' 'eavy on a stick. 'George,' 'e whispers, lookin' at me dismal outer 'is one eye as wasn't bunged up, an' shakin' 'is 'ead solemn, 'I'm through wiv racin',—an' 'e was. They'd a whip round fer 'im soon after, an' he went off to New Zealand that same month.

"Well, I never gives up 'ope o' gettin' square wiv

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that there schoolmaster, an' when them suffridge wimmin starts burnin' 'ouses down I thinks I sees me chance. So one day I takes a 'ansom down to their place in Lincoln's Inn an' looks in, an' sez I wants to give 'em a 'andsome subscripshun. Lumme, funds must 'ave bin low, fer they was all over me, some 'arf-dozen on 'em, but when I sez wot I wants done in return for it, they fair sets about me wiv their tongues, 'eaded by one purple-faced old 'en. Knowin' wot they was capable of, I beats a 'asty retreat, this crimson Rambler 'ard after me, callin' out fer me to be ashamed o' meself. 'It's you men,' she yells—'strewth! I thought she'd be stickin' a 'atpin inter me if I wasn't dam quick. 'It's you men that's the cause of all the trouble,' she screams, comin' right out inter the street. 'Yes,' I shouts back at 'er, 'an' your trouble is that yer can't git one'—an' bolts.

"An' just to think, if it 'adn't bin fer them two young —— Dammit! Touch the bell, somebody."

BY
NEIL M. GUNN



HALF-LIGHT

I

“**W**HERE THE half-sphered scabious nod in a purple mist.” The words were pencilled on a scrap of an old envelope as though jotted down hastily or in semi-darkness, and represented the only writing of any sort found in his clothes. But to me the words represented—what?

I could not answer. They haunted me with the persistence of inexplicable but portentous meanings. Haunted me more uneasily than ever, when, after an absence of some years, I got caught again in the half-light which comes to that grey northern land when the sun has died finally beyond the distant headland, the crouching headland which shuts off half the Western world and broods on the sea. There is a quality in this half-light that is at once a folding of wings and an awareness. Colour intensifies, “runs”, so that the ditchside of kingcups at hand becomes a deep still flame of gold, and the field of “half-sphered scabious” beyond the bank swoons in a veritable ravishment of “purple mist”. Into the silence creeps gradually a listening stillness. The bleating of a sheep or far barking of a dog dies out in ears that continue to hear the echoing forlornness. Upon the body itself, squat-

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ting stiffly, steals that subconscious alertness which, if a sudden hand were to descend on a shoulder, would cause a jump with the heart in the mouth. A mystical bathing, a physical brooding. It is the hour of the Earth Spirit.

But not alone of the Earth Spirit. All that has been bred of the Human Spirit for untold generations is interwoven in this web, subtly interwoven, so that that something of intangible sadness which films vision comes of a sense of human things for-gone, of heroic days leaving heroic ghosts to a tenuous half-light. . . .

And thereupon, as though waiting its chance, steals through from the back of the mind the thought that possibly he saw it like this, and, having seen, was driven to jotting down "notes" like any conscious, deliberate artist. That was the inexplicable, portentous thing, the uncomfortable thing. *I should* have been prepared to accept the tragic circumstances as they were plainly accepted by the village or township. The young head-master had taken to the practice of bathing down by the rocks in the evening after school hours. Then one night he didn't come back, and later a little heap of clothes was found in Breac Cove.

Cold, deep, green water licks about the black, barnacled rocks by the entrance to Breac Cove, the speckled cave, with its wonderful fairy-coloured walls of purples and yellows and greens, with its great flattish roof curving to the droop of a gashed upper lip and beset by tiny stalactites—stalactites which can draw no answering forms from the round, multi-coloured pebbles that slither uneasily beneath

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a wandering foot. Wrack of sea-ware here, too, going inward in parallel lines of high-tidal storm, till all is swallowed up in a threatening gloom. Regarded steadily, how this gloom is pierced by shifty, glittering points of light, like the beady eyes of monstrous, tusked sea-animals lying in wait!

That, and the mystifying scabious "note"—together with my most vivid memories of his attitude to this same grey Seaboard when we "dugged" together in Edinburgh. His vehemence had startled me. "I tell you I wouldn't go back there—no, not though it meant a fortune; not though it meant ——" wordless, he waved an arm and laughed harshly. "The place is dead, man! It's done! Good God, it's full of ghosts! The little harbours are silting up, the curing sheds are roofless, the boats are gone. And what else is there? What else was there ever there but life in the heyday of the old mad fishings? What are the few crofts but crouching, squatting brute things—dead, too, by heavens!" He walked up and down, while I continued to stare at him. The face, normally pale, had whitened to a lip-twisted intensity; the eyes, normally lazy, became storm points of light. "No, not likely! We've been starved enough! When I get my degree I'm going out East. I'm going to get warm with colour and sun and snakes!" Then he became conscious of himself and sat down; but somehow his throaty laugh availed nothing and died abruptly into a long silence.

That was his first real outbreak. But once he had thus shown his mind, it appeared much easier for him thereafter to refer to the matter. Any desolate

scene, any description of grey barren wastes, would draw a sort of commenting undertone. "Just so!" He understood all about it. Not much could be told him. The most fearsome and ungodly places could at best draw a nod. "Quite. I follow. But——" "But what?" "To be the finished article it just lacks that something of decay——" "Look here, Iain, you're getting positively distorted, a bally decadent ——" "My dear chap, who's the decadent? Do I go reading all that sort of stuff you do? Do I have anything to do with Celtic Twilights or quattro-centists or any life-at-second-hand business of that sort? You enjoy that: I don't—no more than I do the grey wastes—yonder!" "Well, dammit, why can't you leave the blessed wastes alone?" I said, suddenly put out. "I'm going to, I assure you. Don't worry about that!"

I didn't exactly worry about it. Yet like an insidious poison his tormented visioning of our birthland must have got some sort of hold on me, for a chance occurring to spend a protracted period in Italy I jumped at it. Free of his influence, in that land of colour and sun, my memories by degrees so softened that I was guilty once or twice (oh, the stifling heat and the flies of high summer!) of writing verses to that birthland, each line drenched, indeed, in the cool dews of the northland twilights. If only old Iain had been able to look through his eyelashes. . . . Then came chance word that he had accepted the old Oulster school! I was shocked. I should have been infinitely less shocked, I think, if I had heard he had proceeded to the South Sea Islands and "gone native."

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No one else appeared to be shocked, however. A stray home paper reached me, commenting on how happy the appointment, how fitting indeed that an Honours graduate should return to shed lustre on the places of his boyhood, and (they doubted not) be instrumental in equipping many a bare-legged laddie for future high appointments in Church and State. I laughed. So much for these old proud college-day ideas. How quickly, how smoothly, the world puts them in their place, oftenest without even the sentimental paragraph of the local reporter! The Seaboard wasn't such a dead place after all! In truth, I didn't quite know whether to be sorry or pleased about it; for I am quite willing to confess that Iain's sensitiveness to Seaboard "atmosphere" had not been lost on me. Even at that time I had been jealous of justifying the artist, the literary spirit; and how disturbing had been that elusive atmosphere to him then, how real! I had understood intimately—even while I may have wished that the old homeland had not been the subject of it. Yet now here he was apparently, having sloughed this sensitive skin, settling down to the daily round, much in the style of hard-fisted business men who have had what they regard as their callow Tennyson or Browning days. And that I didn't like.

However, there was abundant material of assurance for me in Italy, inexhaustible assurance, and it was not until the succeeding autumn that I visited the homeland—to find Oulster hush-voiced in gloom. Breac Cove with that little heap of clothes, the scabious "note", and my Edinburgh memories. . . . I got up from the ditchside to find my body a-shiver.

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Could I accept the "accident"? Would there not be some more "notes" somewhere among his papers? . . . But the evening chill must have crept to my bones, and I shivered again.

II

To come in to the presence of Iain's mother is instinctively to perform some act of courtesy or homage. A suffusing welcoming of the face, a mysterious something of the spirit, a thin blue-veined hand—and you are bending over that hand as over a queen's. Your mind hesitates to dare any expression of sympathy, for words, conventional words, are stilled in this air of quiet steadfastness, of sweet dignity.

"The sea is cruel," she says, presently. "I've always been frightened of the sea, though we've always belonged to it. We managed to send him away—but he didn't escape it." The eyes moisten, the lips grow tremulous, the thin fingers make a little pleat of the black silk dress on her lap. "He always had a word for you."

"We were happy together."

She nods. I turn away, for there is that in her face I may not look long upon.

"He was a good boy to come home—because of me. But I should—I should have left him."

In the end, as I prepare to go, it is with the utmost sincerity I manage:

"I thought I might be of some little help. All his books and papers—I could arrange and pack them—anything like that."

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My hand receives a quick pressure. It is very kind of me. I mumble something, to find that the tears are in my throat, that they sting my eyes. I turn quickly up the little path from the schoolhouse.

On the morrow she left the schoolhouse to return to the old fishing cottage, her brave adventure over; back to the old walls, the old memories, to sit through the half-light till the fulfilment of that mystical promise of a final Dawn.

Her going gave me a whole evening, a whole night, alone with his books. I locked the front door, I drew the blinds of his study. My legs trembled with the slightest excitement. There was just this about it: I felt that were there anything unusual in the manner of his disappearance, then the information were better in my hands than in those, perhaps, of any other. Whether I could understand better or not was an argument in self-modesty that did not arise: I knew definitely I could so keep the information to myself that the lady his mother, having made her great spiritual renunciation, should not be aroused by the black iniquity of soulless, bowelless gossip.

The first superficial survey of his study astonished me. Yes, he had very decidedly started reading. I skim over the bindings. Fancy gets struck by the prevailing note of green, from the lengthy row of old Bohn's Classical Library to Conrad's *Chance*. Sea-green, I immediately think, and pause to look more closely at obviously new backs. As title follows title I hear the sea's surge, see it breaking on tropical reef or on grey rock of the Hebrides. The grey note is actually interspersed, too, with a Yeats and, yes, a grey-covered Fiona Macleod.

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Of course! I pluck out the Fiona Macleod. . . . Ah, I expected it, I knew it! The volume is pencil-annotated into a criss-cross jigsaw puzzle. Here on a double sheet of notepaper are something like the beginnings of a considered essay—on the Celtic Twilight! The opening satire is good, if a trifle bitter, sweeping. He finds it difficult to be patient. Then my smile dies out. A short paragraph, and the Seaboard lives before me. Gathering a few choice Celtic blooms he throws them with the slightest of gestures into the Seaboard atmosphere, and immediately they shrivel up like flowers in a grey frost. "Here's the Celtic Twilight for you, if you like!" he says. I rebel in the first words that come: "Ah, but you forget that you are looking at an old literature with a modern, agnostic eye. That makes a difference!" And suddenly it is as though I see his face before me, his mouth twisting. "And wasn't Fiona Macleod a modern?" I snap the book to and return it.

I have got to make a pathway through this jungle of reading and annotating: he has got to put the weapon in my hand. Promiscuous quotation would be like cutting round and round in a circle. Let me take a poem of his, both because it hints at the true significance of that scabious "note", and because verse-making does necessitate a process of thought-refining, a certain quintessential treatment of idea. It is the only completed poem I find—whatever else of verse there is being fragmentary. It is also interesting as carrying on the Edinburgh attitude, so that there is a certain mental continuity—with this addition: that he is now attempting to give concise

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expression to his physical desire for the Seaboard's opposite.

It is headed "The Croft", and the opening verses run:

The dark wind up the braes
From the cold sea
Comes whining its barren ways
Through the grey tufts, days on days,
Mercilessly,

Combing each withered mass
Of wilted hair;
Between the tufts there pass
The lean kine cropping the grass,
Grey-green and bare.

No more colour nor sound
Than that. The stern
Lean years are all around,
Grey boulders that abound
For death's grey cairn.

The poem is called "The Croft" as though instinctively the mind of the writer felt that it is the Earth Spirit that is the dominant thing—not the dominated Human Spirit of the old crofter. For from this point onward it is the old crofter of the poem who speaks. Straightway, indeed:

Here from this sheltered lair
Of blaeberry
And withy stems I stare
At the dead years and dare
My blasphemy.

And so he is off. As the whole runs to very many verses only the illustrative trend need be attempted. There is, for example, youth's visioning of the

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"colour and sun and snakes", the seduction of the East:

Days out of mind did the beat
Of my heart rhyme
The pulse of illicit fleet
Passing of sandall'd feet,
Days out of time.

As Chinese lamps come aglow
To a piping flute
Did my secret dream-flowers blow
Into colour and luscious sweet flow
Of forbidden fruit.

Luscious and rich enough, but savage, too, where

Vast scorching noons held sway
Over naked flesh
That tramped down the desert's way. . . .

The realities are envisaged to the sweat-blinding and the "miraged mesh". Nothing "poetic" or "twilight" about it. On the contrary, a savagery of primal exultation. For these things have been denied by the unpoetic grey years that lie about him like inescapable grey boulders. And he misses nothing, as though every forbidden, sensuous thing had to be savoured. Colour cannot be left alone, till in one verse it is positively cloying:

And colour that ached on the eyes,
From snake-lustred gleam
To scarlet of poisonous lies;
And colour more soft than the sighs
From passion's harem.

Such the imaging. The temptation to quote is nearly irresistible. I realize, however, that the appeal

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of the verses to me may be bound up in the personal element, and that to the normal reader they may be quite unexceptional. But the concluding three verses I should like to quote in order that the Edinburgh attitude may be given its due Scots metaphysical twist, and a seal set to his whole thought up to this stage. Here is the croft, here his denial of it, his rebellion against it and its "grey creed"—his "blasphemy", as he calls it. Then:

Sin? And my dried lips twist
On this childish name
For the fire and the knotted fist,
The dream-woven gossamer mist,
The flame upon flame.

Colour and passion and sun,
These three my gods
Over all—and these three were one—
Painting with sundering vision
The very peat sods.

Sin? Till wild laughter shook
When the word it saith:
Till old laughter—stares at the Book
That stares back with Jehovah's look
And His grey breath.

III

In the absence of anything more forceful than "The Croft", I found myself compelled to adjust my premonitions. That the theme should have been a croft and a crofter rather than the sea and a fisherman pointed to one possible interpretation of everything; namely, that he had found in such literary

outlet for his feelings a satisfying relief; nay, more, that the very "complex" which the Seaboard stood for became, through the literary channel, an original and great unifying theme for essay and verse. I know how scarce original themes are for the modern writer, how he has to hunt for one and quarry in it. Here, on the contrary, was a positive obsession, instinct with the greatest qualities, awaiting a virile development that would be a most realistic counterblast to the Fiona Macleod twilights, and from the land of Gaeldom.

Quite. It explained everything. I became conscious of the loss of a fellow-worker who might have set our Seaboard on fire. At that moment I tasted the bitterest sorrow of his passing. Yes, it surely explained everything. The scabious business was just the colour line of some contemplated poem; the bathing no more than a purging of the day's petty toils before the compositions of the night. That he should have been plucked away like that. . . .

I took a turn up and down the study. The small hours were upon the deserted schoolhouse. A sense of stillness and empty rooms surrounded me. In an involuntary visioning I saw some of the doors of these rooms standing agape, others blindly closed. Tenantless; their emptiness crowding round this ghostly brain of a room I walked in. What was I doing here? . . .

I lifted my mind from this trivial by-play. "Yes, it explains everything," I said. And by the very sound of my words in the silence I suddenly knew it explained nothing. There was a "feel" for life in him, for naked life, that no creative artistry could

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ever satisfy. Life itself was what mattered, was the blinding thing: not its expression, its "life-at-second-hand business". . . .

What was I doing here? The question became insistent. The backs of the books regarded me in a certain way. The very swirl in the air I made as I walked was, as it were, populous with the question. I stopped dead.

I had no fear of Iain Mackay. I had no fear even of the appearance of his naked spirit. Whatever of mere curiosity there may have been in the original twist of my thought, there was certainly nothing now but that curiosity actuated by a sense of service. I should like to be the discoverer of knowledge so that his mother might be safe. . . . Safe from what? For the first time I really faced the question. The books watched, particularly Fiona Macleod, which I hadn't pushed right flush with the others. Safe from—from—I dismissed the halting horror of hesitation. "Iain Mackay", I thought, deliberately, "epitomized in himself this particular seacoast. He knew with an intimacy of the marrow its uttermost essence. He merged again with that essence willingly or unwillingly, but in some way *wittingly*."

I paused, listening, on edge. There was Fiona Macleod. In an instant I had gone up and smashed the book flush. On a level with my face on the top shelf of the bookcase was a tobacco smoker's cabinet, and as the bookcase shook under the impact of my fist the little wooden door of the cabinet swung noiselessly open, revealing to my staring eyes a blue tobacco jar and a black-covered, thick notebook leaning against it.

NEIL M. GUNN

A notebook! Presently my hand reached out for it; then restraining a desire to look around, I went deliberately to the oak knee-desk and sat down.

IV

It was a diary of sorts, at least an irregularly-kept record of evening excursions and midnight thought. It starts with the Edinburgh attitude, toned down, as theory must be toned down, in face of actualities. He notes things, names them, severs the thought from the fact in many a raw local phrase. This impression of coming into contact with things physically is very vivid, the visual sense being curiously abetted by the tactile. You can not only see the grey rock his hands touch, but feel its roughness with his finger-tips; and not only the tactile but the auditory as well, so that when sand is rubbed by his bare soles on a dry ledge of the rock the sound sets your teeth on edge.

And you sense the same old aim in it all. He is at his game of purposely stripping things bare, tearing ruthlessly the films and the fancies, so that the essential starkness may be laid open—like a dry fibrous wound. For there is no blood in the body of this land of his, only a greyness and unheeding expanse. There may be a skeleton—of kirkyard bones. He wants to make sure he has no illusions about that, no “Celtic Twilight hallucinations”, as he insistently puts it.

And then the change comes.

It comes gradually, almost furtively. A few leaves of the notebook escape under the fingers and it is

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more pronounced. Little by little he is slipping into the habit of identifying himself with things, at first with the apparent excuse of gaining more graphic force in the phrasing, but then, as it seems, without his always being aware of it. Keats said he could be the sparrow pecking about the gravel; but the old woman of Tíree said:

It is the grey rock I am,
And the grey rain on the rock.

Iain was losing his destroying, logical objectiveness, and occasionally identifying himself with the outer forces, the surrounding elemental forces. Not yet at the stage of the old woman of Tíree by any means, but rendered occasionally reflective, subjective, in a new momentarily quiescent way. The process goes on, subtly but persistently, begins to eat into him with a certain secretiveness which he plainly hides even from himself; then less plainly hides; until at last even the human figures he encounters become slightly more significant than spent automata.

Slipping some more pages, I find this entry where the secretiveness blossoms:

"Went out on the edge of the dark and came on ould Sanny at the Look-out. His grey whiskers were to the sea and he spoke to me without turning round. I wonder what moves in his head? I'll tackle him one of these nights, when I've more time. I know definitely he thinks now and then of the old fishing days, and *sees* them, too." He draws in his breath on that wheezy 'Ay,' then spits fully. 'Done! Done!' he says. 'It's no' what I remember.' It's not. God

knows it's not. The gaping curing sheds in the darkening, the glooming, pervasive greyness, the lonely calling of the wheeling gulls. As I left ould Sanny I felt like laughing at it all, as it twisted and knotted in me. A husk of a place! A place to be laughed at. . . .

"I used to laugh, too, at Fiona Macleod and the like, but now—I'm damned if I'm not becoming fanciful myself. The tall grey salmon-net poles 'got' me to-night. They stand there in that bunch near enough together, so that you could almost spit from one to the other; yet to-night each seemed lonely and thin and wrapped up in a grey self-communing. 'Apart' is the word. Good Lord—'apart!' Yet there it is. These bits of grey weather-cracked poles! And they 'got' me with a sense of kinship, so that I stood amongst them till my hearing and sight became preternaturally acute and my body stiff and immovable. From their little green plateau you look down on the harbour basin. It is empty. Look long enough—it fills! Oh, I know it is imagination, that I am allowing my staring eyes 'to see things'. Obviously there is nothing—nothing material. There is merely this much: the place has its 'influence'. By way of experiment, I have given way to this influence once or twice. I give way again. A certain hypnotic, sinking sensation. . . . The harbour basin fills. Boat-decks, rigging, masts slanting to rest in their crutches, figures moving about, at first dimly, then more distinctly; a face, faces; sounds: all coming before the staring eyes through stages, as it were, of imperfect focusing, till the picture lives, moves, throbs. A species of 'movies', if you like—for away from the

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influence one must needs jest about it to keep balance. But under the influence—my father's stride, a trifle quicker than the others; the face a trifle more alert; the tongue with its ever-ready shaft. And there his men from the Lews—the heave-ho! chant of the Gaelic voices, the *krik! krik!* of the halyards as mast goes slowly aloft. The brown sails—there they go slipping past the quay-wall to breast the sea: out of the smooth harbour-basin to this restless dipping and rising and gliding of the great, brown-winged sea-birds they are. The smother of life left behind, the ripe richness of the young women gutters' faces, the kindly wrinkles of the old, the incredibly deft fingers, the talk, the laughter, the work.

"An ache comes to the soul, the lips stir to an old savour, saline, brimful of life. Something here of the marrow, ineradicable. School-keeping, shop-keeping, book-clerking, all the pale, anæmic occupations of landsmen and citymen, dear Lord—how ghostly! their passion a hectic spurting, their contentment a grey haze. Teaching children all day long so that they may 'get on', may be successful in attaining the clerical stool or pulpit, or in measuring, at a profit, so many yards of red flannel for a country woman's needs. Eh? And being polite always: it pays. God!

"I am a throw-back, am I? Sort of quintessential heritage? All this centred in me as the living evocation of a dead Seaboard? Perhaps my very hate of this place but a sort of wrong-headed, savage worship? What a damned juggling with perhapses!"

Then farther on, and one stage farther on, this:

"With what an exquisite shudder the cold green water twists round body and limbs! It ensheaths you.

NEIL M. GUNN

Gracious and savage in a way less obvious than the East. In its coldness what caressing of clean passion! You want to throw caution to the winds and write of it in a choice prose, as of a beautiful woman, coldly unattainable, but near, so that her eyes are regarding yours with a measured expressionlessness—that at any moment may break and engulf you.

"I struggle to cast off this twilight phrasing, to regard the sea with clear eyes, knowing the Old Man as he is—veritably 'sea-green and incorruptible.' Yet even that leads me to a choosing of images! And when the shuddering caress of the water takes body and limbs, and an exultation grips overhand at the wave-tops. . . . You can keep going on for ever. Turning back, indeed, is a shattering. On and on, the under knowledge that you are going too far breeding a warning and an excitement. And how vision riots as the doubtfulness of the body's safety increases! In such a position is not one justified in dropping the stark logicalities and rioting, has not one earned the right? On and on, arm cleaving, body cleaving. . . .

"Suddenly it is as though something pulls you up. You stop, tread water, look back to the shore. Panic forces rush to a muster. You mutter a scattering imprecation at them—and start back in a long slow stroke. The water grows chilly, gets the back of your neck in a cold grip when you turn over. It is a long way. It is a devilish long way. Limbs begin to drag. A numbing sensation spreads. . . .

"At last the jagged rocks, the dark weeds, the black entrance to Breac Cove.* Feet touch. You drag the body a yard or two and let it lie. The round stones press into it softly, the wet weed is a velvety caress.

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Your head rolls off your arm to the cool stones and the sea-water is a faint gurgling and lapping infinitely far off. You realize with a remote, impersonal unconcern that you could not have gone much farther—and come back. . . .”

One more quotation and we are done, though it is with reluctance I pass over a description of the twilight hour at Breac Cove, not so much because of the wild beauty and lurking ferocity dwelt upon, as of the obvious giving way to its “influence”.

“The struggle to-night was the hardest yet, for when the pause came and the panic forces rushed the brain, I continued to tread water and did not immediately start for the shore. In going out a saying had come to my mind from *The Little Book of the Great Enchantment*, and prefaced, I think, to *The Dirge of the Four Cities*, by Fiona Macleod. Fiona Macleod! There will ever be a grain of bitterness in my acknowledgment of him, or of Yeats, or of any of the modern Celtic twilighters, an irritable impatience of their pale fancies, their posturing sonorities and follies. Yet on a certain side they are ‘getting’ me, and sometimes a phrase, a thought, has a positively uncanny, mesmeric power over my very flesh.

“This sort of dream poetry is clearly a drug, and of the most insidious. Intellect strives and flashes towards some final revealing illumination—till the effort inevitably expends itself like a twopenny rocket attempting the work of a sun. And when failure thus rushes down in a renewed darkness, swamping all meaning and logic—dream poetry is there, a glimmering half-light, beckoning. Not an interpretation

of the Ultimates: a refuge from them. The man of action, with his raw grip on the realities, ignores it—till he finds the sphere of his activities dissolved like some unsubstantial pageant, till (for this is the thought) the routh of life that swarmed the Seaboard and clothed the very salmon-poles is left a ghostly greyness and a calling of gulls. Then poetry casts its net, its iridescent net, and the silvery fish of the intellect is meshed in the music of lost days and beauties forgone. My images get mixed, I think—like my thought, and the raw-bitter becomes the bitter-sweet. Such a lovely vagueness is poetry, if one could but admit it! Perhaps the making of all great poetry has involved this fight—and this admission. Perhaps the men who have written greatly of the half-light have known the stark realities of the light. Let me say as much, even if I don't believe it yet, for, after all, what do I know of the Ultimates that I should talk of a refuge from them? . . . There the fading light on the breast of the sea, there the dim-glowing West facing me as arm and body cleave through : and haunting my brain hypnotically the saying: 'And the symbol of Murias is a hollow that is filled with water and fading light.' "

I am conscious of a light, a glimmering light. It is the half-light of the dawn on the window-blind.

"Come away ben," she invited me, after we had sat in the kitchen for a little time; and I followed her to the parlour. It was bare of the gilt china ornaments and feminine gods of the old days; indeed, it was altogether bare.

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"This", she said simply, "is going to be his study."

I knew a moment's insecurity. I suppose I was still young enough to think that tragedy is a thing to be swept into the dark places out of mind.

"So we'll put the bookcase there," she went on, gently, indicating a wall, "and the desk there—fornet the window."

I nodded, and, looking away through the window, saw the grey sea. Old, it looked, as eternity.

"My time cannot be so long—and the books and things of his will be company for me." Her voice was thin and very sweet. A quietening came on me.

At the doorway I turned. Her eyes were smiling on me through her tears.

"He loved being here at home with you," I said. "He was happy with you. And he loved the old harbour and the sea."

"Perhaps, perhaps," she answered, her hands pressing my hand in quick acknowledgment. "I am so glad you think it. It was sometimes—on my mind. But I think he did love it—in the end; and we've always belonged to the sea. . . ."

BY
NEIL M. GUNN



THE MOOR

A FEW MILES back it had looked like a sea-anemone on a vast tidal ledge, but now, at hand, it rose out of the moor's breast like a monstrous nipple. The scarred rock, heather tufted, threw a shadow to his aching feet, and because he was young enough to love enchantment in words, he savoured slowly, "like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." With a nameless shudder of longing he passed his tongue between his sticky lips. The wide Sutherland moor under the August sun was silent as a desert.

At a little pool by the rock-base he drank and then dipped his face.

From the top of the rocky outcrop the rest of his tramp unrolled before him like a painted map. The earth fell away to the far sea, with cottages set here and there upon it like toys, and little cultivated strips, green and brown, and serpentine dark hollows.

He kept gazing until the sandwich in his mouth would not get wet enough to swallow. Then his eyes rested on the nearest cottage of all.

The loneliness of that cottage was a thing to catch the heart. Its green croft was snared in the moor's

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outflung hand. In the green stood a red cow. Creaming in upon his mind stole the seductive thought of milk. Tasting it made a clacking sound in his mouth and he stopped eating.

As he neared the cottage the red cow stared at him, unmoving save for the lifeless switch of her tail. The cottage itself, with its grey curved thatch and pale gable-end, made no move. The moor's last knuckle shut off the world.

The heather had not yet stirred into bloom and, far as the eye could see, lay dark under the white sun. He listened for a sound . . . and in that moment of suspense it came upon him that the place was bewitched.

A dog barked and every sense leapt. The tawny brute came out at the front door, showing half-laughing teeth, twisting and twining, and in no time was at his back. He turned round, but still kept moving towards the door, very careful not to lift his eyes from those eyes, so that he nearly tumbled backwards over the doorstep . . . and was aware, with the beginnings of apologetic laughter, that he was in the presence of a woman. When he looked up, however, the laugh died.

Her eyes were gipsy dark. Perhaps she was twenty. Sunk in the darkness of her eyes were golden sun motes. Madonna of the adder-haunted moor. His confusion stared speechless. A tingling trepidation beset his skin. A tight drawn bodice just covered and repressed her breasts. Her beauty held the still, deep mesmerism of places at the back of beyond. She was shy, yet gazed at him.

The dry cup of his flesh filled with wine. Then his

eyes flickered, shifted quickly; he veiled them, smiling, as though the rudeness of his bared emotion had gone forth unpardonably and touched her skin.

To his stammered request for milk, she smiled faintly, almost automatically, and disappeared.

Then he heard the beating of his heart. Through the warmth of his tired body swept a distinct heat. Excitement broke in spindrift. He smiled secretly to himself, absorbed.

When he caught himself listening at the door, however, he immediately bespoke the dog, inviting its approach with such a sudden snapping hand that the brute leapt back, surprised into a short growl. He awaited her appearance so alive and happy that he was poised in apprehension.

She brought the milk in a coarse tumbler. He barely looked at her face, as if good manners could not trust his instinct; but the last grain of thanks he concentrated in a glance, a word or two, a smile breaking into a laugh. She had covered somewhat the wide V gleam of her breast, had swept back her hair; but the rents, the burst seam under an arm, the whole covering for her rich young body was ragged as ever, ragged and extraordinarily potent, as if it sheathed the red pulse at white beauty's core. He said he would drink the milk sitting outside if she didn't mind. She murmured, smiled, withdrew.

He ate his lunch excitedly, nibbling at the sandwiches to make them last, throwing crusts to the dog. His mind moved in its bewilderment as in coloured spindrift, but underneath were eyes avid for the image of her body, only he would not let their stare fix. Not yet. Not now . . . Living here at the back of

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beyond . . . this secret moor . . . Extraordinary! The wave burst in happy excited spindrift. . . . But underneath he felt her like a pulse and saw her like a flame—a flame going to waste—in the dark of the moor, this hidden moor. Attraction and denial became a tension of exquisite doubt, of possible cunning, of pain, of desire. His soul wavered like a golden jet.

As the last drop of the milk slid over, he heard a sound and turned—and stared.

A withered woman was looking at him, eyes veiled in knowingness. She said, "It's a fine day that's in it."

"Yes, isn't it!" He got to his feet.

She slyly looked away from him to the moor, the better to commune with her subtle thought. A wisp of grey hair fell over an ear. Her neck was sinewy and stretched, her chin tilted level from the stoop of her shoulders. The corners of her eyes returned to him. Just then the girl came to the door.

"It's waiting here, Mother." Through a veiled anxiety quietly, compellingly, she eyed the old woman.

"Are ye telling me?"

"Come on in."

"Oh, I'm coming." She turned to the young man and gave a little husky laugh, insanely knowing. The daughter followed her within, and he found himself with the thick glass in his hand staring at the empty doorway. "*She leuch*" rose a ballad echo, like a sunless shudder. A sudden desire to tiptoe away from that place seized him. My God! he thought. The blue of heaven trembled.

NEIL M. GUNN

But he went to the door and knocked.

"This is the glass——" he began.

She smiled shyly, politely, and, taking the glass from his outstretched hand, smoothly withdrew.

His hand fell to his side. He turned away, going quietly.

Down between the cottages, the little cultivated strips green and brown, the serpentine dark hollows, he went jerkily, as though the whole place were indeed not earth, but a painted map, and he himself a human toy worked by one spring. Only it was a magic spring that never got unwound. Even in the hotel that overlorded the final cluster of cottages, the spring seemed wound up tighter than ever.

For privacy he went up and sat on his bed. "Lord, I cannot get over it!" he cried silently. He got off his bed and walked about the floor. This was the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to him . . . without, as it were, quite happening to him.

Inspiration had hitherto thrilled from within. This was from without, and so vast were its implications that he could not feel them all at once in a single spasm of creation. He got lost in them and wandered back to his bed, whereon he lay full length, gazing so steadily that he sank through his body into a profound sleep.

He awoke to a stillness in his room so intense that he held his breath, listening. His eyes slowly turned to the window where the daylight was not so much fading as changing into a glimmer full of a moth-pale life, invisible and watchful. Upon his taut ear the silence began to vibrate with the sound of a

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small tuning fork struck at an immense distance.

His staring eyes, aware of a veiled face . . . focused the face of the girl on the moor. The appeal of her sombre regard was so great that he began to tremble; yet far back in him cunningly he willed body and mind to an absolute suspense so that the moment might remain transfixed. Footsteps on the corridor outside smashed it, and all at once he was listening acutely to perfectly normal voices.

"Well, Mr. Morrison—you here? What's up now?"

"Nothing much. The old woman up at Albain—been certified."

"So I heard. Poor old woman. When are you lifting her?"

"To-morrow."

"There's no doubt, of course, she is . . . ay, ay, very sad."

"Yes. There's the girl, too—her daughter. You'll know her?"

"Well—yes. But she's right enough. I mean there's nothing—there. A bit shy, maybe . . . like the heather. You know."

"I was wondering what could be done for her."

"Oh, the neighbours will look after her, I'm sure. She'll just have to go into service. We're fixed up for the season here now, or I . . ."

The footsteps died away, and the light in the bedroom withdrew itself still more, like a woman withdrawing her dress, her eyes, but on a lingering watchfulness more critical than ever, and now faintly ironic.

His body snapped into action and began rest-

lessly pacing the floor, irony flickering over the face. Suddenly he paused . . . and breathed aloud—"The auld mither!" His eyes gleamed in a profound humour.

The exclamation made him walk as it were more carefully, and presently he came to the surface of himself some distance from the hotel and realized where he was going.

But now he cunningly avoided the other cottages and in a roundabout way came in over the knuckle of moor in the deepening dusk. The cow was gone and the cottage seemed more lonely than ever. Indeed, it crouched to the earth with rounded shoulders drawing its grey thatch about its awful secret. Only the pale gable-end gloomed in furtive watchfulness.

Grey-green oasis, dark moor, and huddled cottage were privy to the tragedy of their human children, and, he felt, inimical to any interference from without. Never before had he caught this living secretive intensity of background, although, as a young painter believing in vision, it had been his business to exploit backgrounds of all sorts.

The girl herself walked out from the end of the house, carrying two empty pitchers. On the soft turf her feet made no sound. Unlike her background she was not inimical but detached. And, as her slave, her background spread itself in quiet ecstasy under her feet.

By the time he joined her at the well she had her buckets full, and as he offered to carry them she lifted one in each hand. He pursued his offer, stooping to take them. The little operation brought their bodies into contact and their hands, so that there

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was a laughing tremble in his voice as he walked beside her, carrying the water. But at the doorway, which was reached in a moment, he set down the buckets and raised his cap.

As he went on into the moor, still smiling warmly as though she were beside him, he kept saying to himself that to have dallied or hesitated would have been unpardonable . . . yet not quite believing it . . . yet knowing it to be true.

He sat down on the moor, his heart aflame. The moor lost its hostility and became friendly. Night drew about them her dim purple skin. Silence wavered like the evening smoke of a prehistoric fire. The sense of translation grew in him . . . until the girl and himself went walking on the moor, on the purple, the rippled skin, their faces set to mountain crests and far dawns.

He tore his vision with a slow humour and, getting to his feet, shivered. As he returned by the cottage he saw her coming out of the byre-door and on a blind impulse went up to her and asked:

"Are you not lonely here?"

"No," she answered, with a smile that scarcely touched her still expression.

"Well—it does seem lonely—doesn't it?"

Her eyes turned to the moor and only by a luminous troubling of their deeps could he see that his words were difficult. She simply did not speak, and for several seconds they stood perfectly silent.

"I can understand," he broke through, "that it's not lonely either." But his awkwardness rose up and clutched him. If the thickening dusk saved his colour, it heightened her beauty in a necromantic

way. Mistrust had not touched her, if tragedy had. A watchfulness, a profound instinct young and artless—yet very old.

The front door opened and her mother came peering on to the doorstep. In low quick tones he said:

“I’ll come—to-morrow evening.”

Her eyes turned upon his with a faint fear, but found a light deeper than sympathy.

By the time he got back to the hotel, his companion, Douglas Cunningham, had arrived, round about, with the motor-cycle combination.

“Sorry I’m so late. The beastly clutch kept slipping. I had the devil’s own time of it.”

“Had you?”

“Yes. We’ll have to get down to it to-morrow. . . . What happened?” Douglas looked at Evan shrewdly. “Seems to have lit you up a bit, anyhow!”

“Does it?”

Then Evan told him.

Douglas met his look steadily.

“You can’t see?” probed Evan, finally. “The moor, the lonely cottage, the mad mother, and the daughter. . . . My God, what a grouping! Can’t you see—that it transcends chance? It has overwhelmed me.”

“My dear chap, if you’d been in the ditch with a burst clutch and umpteen miles from nowhere you would have been, by analogy, completely pulverised.”

Their friendly arguments frequently gathered a mocking hostility.

“You show me the clutch of your tinny motor bike,” thrust Evan. “I show you the clutch of

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eternal or infernal life. I'm not proving or improving anything: I'm only showing you. But you can't see. Lord, you are blind. Mechanism, clutch, motor bike . . . these are the planets wheeling about your Cyclops glassy eye. You are the darling of evolution, the hope of your country, the proud son of your race. You are the *thing* we have arrived at! . . . By the great Cuchulain, is it any wonder that your old mother is being taken to a mad-house?"

"By which I gather that you have found the daughter's mechanism—fool-proof?"

Evan took a slow turn about the floor, then with hands in pockets stood glooming satanically. "I suppose," he said, "we have sunk as low as that."

Douglas eyed him warningly.

"Easy, Evan."

Evan nodded. "Whatever I do I must not go in off the deep end!" He suddenly sat down and over his closed fist on the table looked Douglas in the face. "Why shouldn't I go in off the deep end?"

Douglas turned from the drawn lips and kicked off his boots.

"You can go in off any damned end you like," he said.

And in bed, Evan could not sleep. To the pulse of his excitement parable and symbol danced with exquisite rhythm and to a pattern set upon the grey-green oasis of the croft, centring in the cottage . . . fertile matrix of the dark moor.

Vision grew and soon wholly obsessed him. He found in it a reality at once intoxicating and finally illuminating. A pagan freedom and loveliness, a rejuvenation, an immense hope . . . and, following

after, the moods of reflection, of beauty, of face . . . to go into the moor not merely to find our souls but to find life itself—and to find it more abundantly.

But the following evening the little cottage presented quite another appearance. He came under its influence at the very first glance from the near moor crest. It had the desolate air of having had its heart torn out, of having been raped. A spiritless shell, its dark-red door pushed back in an imbecile gape. One could hear the wind in its emptiness. A sheer sense of its desolation overcame him. He could not take his eyes off it.

And presently an elderly woman came to the door, followed by the girl herself. They stood on the doorstep for a long time, then began slowly to walk up to the ridge beyond which lay the neighbours' cottages. But before they reached the ridge they stopped and again for a long time stood in talk. At last the elderly woman put out her hand and caught the girl's arm. But the girl would not go with her. She released herself and stepped back a pace, her body bending and swaying sensitively. The elderly woman stood still and straight, making her last appeal. The girl swayed away from that appeal also, turned and retreated. With hooded shawl her elder remained looking after her a moment, then like a woman out of the ages went up over the crest of the moor.

From his lair in the heather, Evan saw the door close, heard, so still the evening was, the clash and rattle of the latch. And with the door closed and the girl inside, the house huddled emptier than ever.

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His heart listened so intently that it caught the dry sound of her desolate thought . . . she was not weeping . . . her arms hung so bare that her empty hands kept plucking down her sleeves. . . .

She came at his knock. The pallor of her face deepened the dark of her eyes. Their expressionless was troubled and she stood aside to let him in. Only when they were by the fire in the gloom of the small-windowed kitchen did she realize what had happened.

But Evan did not feel awkward. He knew what he had to do like a man who might have imaginatively prepared himself for the test. He placed her chair at the other side of the fire but did not ask her to sit down. He sat down himself, however, and looking into the fire began to speak.

Sometimes he half turned with a smile, but for the most part kept his eyes on the burning peat, with odd silences that were pauses in his thought. He was not eager nor hurried; yet his gentleness had something fatal in it like the darkness of her mood. Sensitiveness that was as exquisite as pain transmuted pain to a haunted monotone.

She stood so still on the kitchen floor that in the end he dared not look at her. Nor did his immobility break when he heard her quietly sit down in the opposite chair, though the core of the fire quickened before his gaze.

Without moving, he started talking again. He did not use words that might appeal to a primitive intelligence. He spoke in the highest—the simplest—way he could to himself.

He looked at himself as a painter desiring to paint

the moor. Why? He found himself dividing the world into spirit and mechanism. Both might be necessary, but spirit must be supreme. Why? Even if from no other point than this that it afforded the more exquisite delight. And the more one cultivated it the more varied and interesting life became, the deeper, the more charming, and, yes, the more tragical. Yes, the more tragical, thereby drawing spirit to spirit in a communion that was the only known warmth in all the coldness of space. And we needed that particular warmth; at moments one needed it more than anything else. Man's mechanism was a tiny flawed toy in the vast flawless mechanism of the universe. But this warmth of his was a thing unique; it was his own special creation . . . and in a way—who could say?—perhaps a more significant, more fertile, thing than even the creation of the whole mechanical universe. . . .

As he thought over this idea for a time, he felt her eyes on his face. The supreme test of spirit would be that while not knowing his words it would yet understand him perfectly—*if it was there*.

"I do not know," he said at last, and repeated it monotonously. "Coming in over the moor there I saw you and the woman. Then there was the moor itself. And you in the cottage. I wish I could understand that. But I cannot understand it, any more than you—or the woman. Yet we understand it, too. And the woman could have helped you. Only you didn't want to be helped in her way yet." He paused, then went on slowly: "I can see that. It's when I go beyond that to my sitting here that it becomes difficult. For what I see is you who are the

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moor, and myself with the moor about me, and in us there is dawn, and out of the moor comes more of us. . . . That sounds strange, but perhaps it is truer than if I said it more directly. For you and I know that we cannot speak to each other yet—face to face.”

Then he turned his face and looked at her.

Her dark eyes were alight with tears that trickled in slow beads down her cheeks.

He gave his face to the fire again. *It was there.*

Quietly he got to his feet. “I’ll make a cup of tea.”

She also arose. “I’ll make it.”

It had grown quite dark in the kitchen. They stood very still facing the unexpected darkness. Caught by something in the heart of it, they instinctively drew together. He turned her face from it.

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In the morning Douglas arrived at the cottage on the heels of the woman with the shawl. The woman had tried the door and found it locked. But her quick consternation lessened when she found the key under the thatch.

Douglas, grown oddly curious, waited for her to come out. She came, with a face as grey as the wall.

“She hasn’t slept in her bed at all.”

“Oh!” His lips closed.

The woman looked at him.

“Do you know . . .?”

“Not a thing,” said Douglas. “Must have gone over the hills and far away. They’ve got a fine morning for it.” And he turned and left her, his scoffing sanity sticking in his throat like a dry pellet.

BY
ERIC LINKLATER



THE DANCERS

MR. G. P. POMFRET was a wealthy man and the centre of as large a circle of friends and relations as the junior partner in a prosperous brewery might reasonably expect to be. But, until he disappeared, he was not famous. Then he became a household word, and the five members of his family—consanguineous, allied and presumptively allied—who disappeared with him, all earned pages in those indefatigable supplements to our national biography, the Sunday newspapers. For with Mr. Pomfret there also vanished Mrs. Pomfret his wife; Lt.-Commander Hugo Disney* and Mrs Disney (*née* Pomfret); Miss Joan Pomfret; and Mr. George Otto Samways, her fiancé.

The circumstances of their joint occultation were remarkable, and as the geographical environment was sufficiently and yet not immeasurably remote from the more advertised holiday haunts of man, the affair took to itself a halo of romance that was entirely different from the hectic nimbus which ever and again makes some obscure police-court luminous.

It has been said that Mr. Pomfret was wealthy.

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He had inherited a large number of shares in an excellent brewery and with them a sanguine and speculative temperament. His fortune persuaded the members of his family, initial and contributory, readily to accept a certain imperiousness of temper which Mr. Pomfret occasionally exhibited; and so when one evening early in June he said, from the top of his dinner-table, "I intend, subject to your approval, to take you all with me on a somewhat unusual holiday," his household (including Lt.-Commander Hugo Disney) and the solitary guest (Mr. George Otto Samways) accepted the invitation in the manner of a royal command.

"Where are we going, daddy?" asked Joan, adeptly disengaging the integument of her peach.

"To Orkney, my dear," replied Mr. Pomfret, and surveyed with benign amusement the expressions of surprise which impinged upon or flitted across the faces of his domestic audience.

Lt.-Commander Disney alone showed no amazement. "That's excellent," he said heartily. "I've meant for long enough to go back there."

Orkney is worthy of some attention. The islands have a romantic appeal as the home of lost races. The Vikings settled there, and before the Vikings there was a mysterious people, Picts or such, little men who vanished and left few traces of their occupation. At some time Culdee monks from Ireland went there; and went again as silently. Stewart earls ruled the islands like young pagan emperors. When the Great War began the British Fleet chose Scapa Flow, in the heart of the Orkneys, as its headquarters and battle haven. Later the German Fleet also

rested there; but at the still bottom, not on the wind-flawed surface of the waters.

It was, however, the excellence of the trout-fishing which led Lt.-Commander Disney to applaud Mr. Pomfret's decision. He had spent the less active intervals in three years of naval warfare in Scapa Flow, and had become acquainted with the opportunities of sport which the island lochs offered to a fisherman robust enough to disregard occasional inclemencies of weather. Frequently he had spoken to Mr. Pomfret of brown trout and sea trout, praising their strain of fishy pugnacity and the delicate savour of their flesh; praising too the lure of sunny waters under a canopy of brilliant sky all painted with cloud galleons, porpoises and swimming dolphins of cloud, and at evening gorgeous with the barred crimson and gold, the errant greens, the daffodil hues, the rosy outflung feathers, of the sun sliding backwards behind the enormous wall of the Atlantic. And these conversations, moving like yeast in Mr. Pomfret's brain, had finally given rise to this momentous decision.

It is unnecessary to consider the manner of the journey north, which was complicated. Mr. Pomfret had rented for two months a large house called Swandale, in one of the seaward parishes in the northern part of the mainland of Orkney; it was considered advisable to take, as well as his family, a motor-car, a chauffeur and three maids. The first week or so of their residence passed pleasantly enough. They were enraptured with the scenery, the vast stretches of ever-changing sea, the majestic cliffs loud with the ceaseless activity of gulls; they watched

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the diving gannets, the ludicrous earnest puffins, the graceful terns, and hysterical oyster-catchers. They were delighted with the shy and independent islanders. They enjoyed the novelty of peat-fires blazing in an open hearth. Lt.-Commander Disney and Mrs. Disney fished with notable success in the neighbouring lochs. Mr. Pomfret walked and inquired diligently into local traditions and history. And Mrs. Pomfret read the works of Lord Lytton, to which she was ineradicably addicted. Joan Pomfret and Otto Samways occupied themselves in ways apparently satisfactory, and certainly remote from the rest of the family.

The holiday would probably have continued on these pleasant and harmless lines had it not been for the imaginative temperament (excited by love and romantic surroundings) of Miss Joan Pomfret. It suddenly occurred to her that they were rapidly approaching Midsummer Day.

Now the summer solstice has, or had, its appropriate festivals. In the northern parts of Britain the sun used indisputably to reign supreme, and, at such times as his presence blessed the earth almost throughout the circle of day and night, it was proper to honour him with dancing and other devout festivities. In Orkney he succeeds at Midsummer in banishing the thief of night for all but a dim hour or so from the dominion of his majesty. There is light on the islands, benign and irresistible, except for one or perhaps two shadowed hours in the cycle of twenty-four.

Something of this was in Joan's mind when she said over the marmalade one morning, "Daddy, the

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day after to-morrow is Midsummer. Let's celebrate, it properly."

"How, my dear?" asked Mr. Pomfret, putting down the toast which was within an inch of his mouth.

"By a midnight picnic. We'll spend the night on an island—on Eynhallow—and see the dawn come up before the afterglow is out of the sky. And we'll dance when the sun shows himself again."

"I haven't danced for years," said Mrs. Pomfret pathetically, "and don't you think the grass would be damp?"

"Tut!" said Mr. Pomfret. "Grass damp? Pouf!" Spousal resistance invariably excited him to action, and he had, it may be remembered, a sanguine nature.

"I should like a chance to watch the birds on Eynhallow," said Lt.-Commander Disney. "They're interesting in the early morning. And we could take plenty of rugs, and a flask, you know, in case it is cold."

"Of course we could." Mr. Pomfret was in a singularly eupeptic mood that morning. He felt positively boyish. "Do you remember, Mother"—he called Mrs. Pomfret Mother when he felt particularly young and could think good-naturedly of her growing a little mature—"Do you remember that bicycling tour I did once in Cornwall? Excellent fun it was, Hugo. It must be twenty-five years ago, and I often wish that I had found an opportunity to repeat it. This idea of yours is splendid, Joan, my dear. Dancing to the Midsummer Sun—Ha! I shall show you all how to dance. Hugo, my boy, will you see about a boat?"

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Eynhallow is a small uninhabited island between the mainland of Orkney and the island of Rousay. It is surrounded by unruly tides, but to the fishermen who know them it is not difficult to land, provided the weather is calm. Those definitely in favour of the expedition were Mr. Pomfret, Lt.-Commander Disney, Joan, and naturally, since Joan would be there, Otto Samways. Mrs. Disney shrugged her shoulders and said, "It will mean the first late night I've had for a fortnight and the first woollen undies I've worn for years. I don't mind, though." Poor Mrs. Pomfret sighed and returned to *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

Hugo Disney persuaded a local fisherman, John Corrigall, that it would be more profitable than lobster-fishing to sail the Pomfret party to Eynhallow and call for them on the following morning, and so the preliminaries of the excursion were successfully completed. John Corrigall was privately convinced that they were all mad—except Mrs. Pomfret, whom he found to be an unwilling victim—but refrained from saying so, except in the privacy of his own family; for a madman's money is as good as that of a man dogmatically and indecently sane, and, indeed, more easily earned.

On Midsummer Eve then, after dinner, the Pomfrets set sail. They carried baskets of food, for a night in the open is a potent ally of hunger, but no instrument of fire, such as a primus stove, for that, Joan said, would be an insult to the omnipotence of the sun, who should rule alone. They took rugs and cushions, and Mrs. Pomfret wore a fur coat and Russian boots. They set a portable gramophone—for they were to dance—in the stern of the boat, and

Otto Samways carried two albums of records. There was a heavy cargo aboard when John Corrigan hauled his sheet and brought the boat's head round for Eynhallow. He landed them, without more incident than a faint protest from Mrs. Pomfret, on a shingle beach, and left them.

And that is the last that has been seen of them.

When Corrigan returned to Eynhallow in the morning, he found the island deserted. He shouted, and there was no answer, he walked round the island, which is small, and found no trace of the midnight visitors. He sat on a rock and struggled heavily with thought, and then, because he was anxious to get back before the tide turned, he sailed home again.

It is, of course, an ingrained belief in the mind of the northern Scot that the English are a flighty, unreliable race. They travel far from home when there is no need to travel, they are wantonly extravagant (John Corrigan had been paid in advance), and their actions spring from impulse instead of emanating slowly from cautious deliberation. They are volatile (as the English say the French are volatile), and their volatility makes them difficult to understand. So John Corrigan said nothing, except to his wife, of the disappearance of the Pomfrets. He had no intention of making a fool of himself by raising what was possibly a false alarm, and the whole day, which might have been profitably spent on investigation, was wasted.

In the evening the chauffeur, an energetic man when aroused, went to make inquiries, and was astounded to hear that his master had apparently vanished. With the decision of a man who had lived

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in cities and learnt, before he took to driving one, the art of evading motor-cars, he told a little girl who happened to be at hand to summon the village constable, and ordered Corrigan to make his boat ready for sea. The latter protested, for the wind and tide were at odds and a pretty sea was breaking round Eynhallow. But the chauffeur was like adamant, and drove the constable and John Corrigan to the shore, helped to push out the boat, and after a stormy crossing landed, wet through, on the island. A thorough search was made, and not a sign of the Pomfrets could be found; nothing, that is, except a little tag of bright metal which was found lying on the grass, the significance of which was unknown to Corrigan and the policeman, who had no experience of modern toilets, and to the chauffeur, who was virtuous and unmarried. Later it was identified simultaneously by the maids as the end, the catch or hatch as it were, of a stocking-suspender such as many ladies wear. If Miss Joan had been dancing vigorously, it might have sprung asunder from the rest of the article and fallen to the ground, they said.

The three maids became hysterical soon after they learnt of the mystery; John Corrigan went home to his bed, convinced that it did not concern him; the constable was useless, having encountered no such case in his previous professional experience; and it was left to the chauffeur to devise a course of action.

He persuaded the constable to cycle to Kirkwall, the capital and cathedral city of Orkney, and report to such superior officers as he might discover there. He insisted on the local telegraph office opening after hours, and sent an expensive message to the news-

paper which guided the thought and chronicled the deeds of the town in which Mr. Pomfret had prominently lived. And he made a careful inventory of everything that the unfortunate party had taken with them. Then he sat down to compose a long letter to the newspaper already mentioned.

The assistant-editor of the paper made instant and magnificent use of the chauffeur's telegram. Times were dull, and his chief was away on holiday. The chief sub-editor was a man of consummate craft and no conscience. Between them they splashed a throbbing, breath-taking story over the two main news columns. They flung across the page a streaming head-line that challenged the hearts of their readers like a lonely bugle sounding on a frosty night. Eynhallow became a Treasure Island encircled by northern mists, and the sober citizens who read this strange story of the disappearance of people whom they knew so well (by sight), whose motor-cars they had envied, and whose abilities they had derided, felt creeping into their souls an Arctic fog of doubt, a cold hush of suspense, a breath of icy wind from the waste seas of mystery. Which was precisely the effect intended by the enterprising assistant-editor and the highly competent sub-editor.

This was the beginning of the story which subsequently took all England by the ears, and echoed, thinly or tumultuously, in ribald, hushed, or strident accents, in railway carriages and on the tops of buses, at street-corners and over dinner-tables, at chamber-concerts and through brass-band recitals, in all places where two or three newspaper-readers were gathered together, and finally in one or two topically-inclined

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pulpits and behind the footlights of the variety stage.

The assistant-editor sent hurrying northwards a young and alert reporter, and it was not his fault that an emissary of a great London evening paper arrived in Orkney before him. For the latter travelled by aeroplane, the evening paper being wealthy and its editor having been noticeably impressed by the provincial report. The first general information, therefore, that Britain had of the Great Pomfret Mystery was a brightly written account of the long flight of Our Special Investigator.

Within twenty-four hours every self-respecting news-sheet in the country had published a map of Orkney, on which the approximate position of Eynhallow was surrounded by a black circle. The more erudite contributed brief historical sketches of the islands, and a few discovered that a church or monastery had once been built on the particular islet of mystery. Brief descriptions of Mr. Pomfret with at least the names, Christian names, and ages of his party appeared in all the papers. Two offered ready-made solutions to the problem, three laughed at it, and one rashly cited as a parallel case the vanishing crew of the *Marie Celeste*.

On the following day a Paymaster-Commander wrote to say that he had once, during the War, motored from Scapa to Swandale (Mr. Pomfret's house), and distinctly remembered seeing Eynhallow. "A charming, sea-girt, romantic-looking island," he wrote, "with the appearance of having withstood a thousand storms and blossomed with a thousand green springtimes." Subsequently an Admiral, who had also been in Scapa during the War, corroborated

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this, writing to say that he had seen the island himself. Thereafter its actual existence was not doubted.

In a short time photographs began to appear, photographs of Mr. Pomfret and his family, one of Lt.-Commander Disney in uniform, and a charming picture of Miss Joan Pomfret playing in a local tennis tournament. The two reporters sent long descriptive stories about nothing in particular, and their respective sub-editors garnished them with suggestive and arresting headlines. Several papers remembered that the *Hampshire*, with Lord Kitchener aboard, had been sunk on the other side of Orkney, and "A Student of Crime" wrote to suggest that a floating mine, one of the chain responsible for that dire catastrophe, had survived to be washed up on Eynhallow, and had blown the Pomfrets into minute and undiscoverable fragments. No sound of an explosion, however, had startled Orkney, and no trace of such a convulsion was apparent on the island. A photograph of John Corrigall and his boat appeared, an artistic camera study with an admirable sky effect. Several stories of mysterious yachts cruising in the vicinity were mooted, and the yachts were all satisfactorily identified as trawlers.

On the second Sunday after the disappearance, when the mystery had been deepened by time and even the most ingenious could offer no likely solution, an eminent clergyman, a staunch supporter of temperance, publicly warned the country against the danger of owning breweries. Mr. Pomfret, he said, was widely known as a brewer, one who had made his fortune out of beer, that enemy of man and canker in the home. And Mr. Pomfret had disappeared.

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Divine vengeance, he said, cometh like a thief in the night. To-day we are here, in the midst of our wickedness, and to-morrow we are plucked up and cast into the oven. Let all, he concluded, who own breweries consider the appalling fate of George Plover Pomfret, and mend their ways by honest repentance while there is yet time.

And then the London paper had a scoop. Its reporter discovered that during all this bustle of conjecture, doubt and query, investigation and disappointment, a German professor had quietly been living, as a summer boarder, in a farmhouse not two miles distant from Swandale. His own explanation of his presence so near the scene of supposed tragedy was that he was collecting and examining survivals of Norse influence in the Orkney dialect; but his story, especially when it was printed alongside his own photograph, met with derisive incredulity, and in the natural excitement that followed this disclosure there was not a little sturdy denunciation of the Hidden Hand. The professor was detained in custody, and was released only on the telegraphic intervention of the German Foreign Secretary, who personally vouched for his honesty and innocence. This again deepened the suspicions of many newspaper readers.

The local police, meanwhile, reinforced by an inspector from Edinburgh and a detective from Scotland Yard, had quietly and systematically established that there were no clues to the whereabouts of Mr. Pomfret and his friends, and no solution to the mystery of their disappearance. It was impossible for any one to get on to or off the island without a boat, and no boat could easily have landed, owing to the

state of the tide, between the hour at which the Pomfrets were disembarked and the morning visit of John Corrigan. No strange vessel had been seen in the vicinity. The Pomfrets could not have made a raft, as some hundreds of people had suggested, because they had nothing out of which to make one, except two luncheon baskets, a gramophone, some records, and a box of gramophone needles which were, it must be admitted, too small to nail together pieces of driftwood, supposing suitable planks to have been present on the beach. Nor, unless they had been attacked by an epidemic mania, a surging and contagious Sindbad complex, was there any particular reason why they should have wanted to make a raft. No clear evidence even of their presence on the island, except an integral portion of a lady's stocking-suspender, was found, and some people suggested that John Corrigan was a liar and that the Pomfrets had never gone there. But the circumstantial evidence of the servants was in Corrigan's favour, and he had not, it was found, the mental ability successfully to dispose of six adult bodies.

Investigation of a practical kind came to an end. There was no one to question and nothing to find. Even the spiritualistic mediums who offered their services were of no real assistance, though some of them claimed to have established communication with Miss Joan Pomfret, who told them that everything was for the best in the best of all possible Beyonds. Mrs. Pomfret, it was reported, had said, "Sometimes it is light here and sometimes it is dark. I have not seen Bulmer, but I am happy." There was a little discussion on the significance of *Bulmer*, till a

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personal friend suggested that it was a mis-tapping for the name of Mrs. Pomfret's favourite author, but the general mystery was in danger of being forgotten, dismissed as insoluble.

It was about this time that Mr. Harold Pinto left Kirkwall in the Orkneys for Leith, sailing on the, s.s. *St. Giles*. Mr. Pinto was a commercial traveller, more silent than many of his class, a student of human nature, and in his way an amateur of life.

When the *St. Giles* was some four hours out of Kirkwall he stepped into the small deckhouse which served as a smoking-room, and, pressing a bell, presently ordered a bottle of beer. There were, in the smoking-room, two other commercial travellers with whom he was slightly acquainted, the reporter of the provincial newspaper which had first heard of the Pomfret case, an elderly farmer who said he was going to South Africa, and a young, bright-eyed man, carelessly dressed, distinguished by a short, stubbly beard. He looked, thought Mr. Pinto, as though he might be a gentleman. His nails were clean; but his soft collar was disgustingly dirty and his clothes had evidently been slept in. He asked for Bass, at the same time as Mr. Pinto, in an educated and pleasant voice, but when the beer came he merely tasted it, and an expression of disgust passed over his face. He took no part in the general conversation, though Mr. Pinto noticed that he followed the talk actively with his eyes—very expressive eyes they were, full, at times, of an almost impish merriment.

The conversation naturally centred round the Pomfret Mystery, and the reporter very graphically told the story from the beginning, embellished with

certain details which had not been published. "There are some things," he said, "which I wouldn't willingly tell outside this company. It's my private belief that old Pomfret took drugs. Don't ask me for proof, because I'm not going to tell you. And there's another thing. Joan Pomfret once asked the gardener at Swandale—he's a local man—whether he knew of any really lonely places near by. The sort of places where there were likely to be no casual passers-by. I didn't send that piece of news to my paper because I'm still waiting for the psychological moment at which to make it public. But you'll admit that it's significant."

The other commercial travellers both contributed theories, at which the reporter scoffed, but Mr. Pinto was almost as silent as the young man with the beard.

"Mass suicide won't do," said the reporter, "however much you talk about crowd psychology; and mass murder, followed by the suicide of the murderer, won't do either. None of them was likely to run amok. And where are the bodies? One at least would have been washed up before now. No, it's my opinion that there's an international gang at the bottom of it, and one of the party—at least one—was either a confederate or a fugitive from the justice of the gang."

The man who was going to South Africa said that he had a cousin who had once disappeared in Mashonaland. He was about to tell the story more fully when the two commercial travellers and the reporter discovered that they were sleepy—it was nearly midnight—and went hurriedly below. And after a

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minute or two the man with the cousin in Mashonaland followed them.

The young man with the stubbly beard sat still, staring at nothing with eyes that were alert and full of comprehension. He seemed to be listening to the throb of the steamer's screw and the answering wash of the sea. His lips moved slightly when a wave, louder than the others, ran with a slithering caress along the ship's side, and he smiled engagingly, looking at Mr. Pinto as though he expected an answering smile.

"The Möder Di",¹ he said, "laughing at fishermen's wives. All summer she laughs lightly, but the laughter of her winter rut is like icebergs breaking."

Mr. Pinto, remarking that it seemed to be a fine night, stepped out on to the deck.

"Oh, a glorious night," said the young man with the beard, following him. "Look at the clouds, like grey foxes running from the moon!"

"Indeed, there is one extraordinarily like a fox," replied Mr. Pinto politely.

"She is hunting to-night," said the young man. "Foxes and grey wolves. And see, there's a stag in the west. A great night for hunting, and all the sky to run through."

Mr. Pinto and his friend had the deck to themselves, and Mr. Pinto began to feel curiously lonely in such strange company.

"Listen," said the young man, pointing over the rail. "Do you hear a shoal of herring talking out there? There's a hum of fear in the air. Perhaps a thresher-shark is coming through the Firth."

¹ Möder Di: The Ninth Wave.

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Mr. Pinto, convinced that he had a lunatic to deal with, was considering an excuse for going below when the young man said: "I saw you sitting silent while those fools were talking about Pomfret's disappearance. Why did you say nothing?"

"Because I didn't think any of their theories were good enough," answered Mr. Pinto, feeling a little easier, "and because I had no theory of my own to offer."

"What do you think? You must think something?"

Mr. Pinto blinked once or twice, and then diffidently suggested, " 'There are more things in heaven and earth,' you know; it sounds foolish, after having been quoted so often and so unnecessarily, but——"

"It does not sound foolish. Those others were fools. You, it seems, are not yet a fool; though you will be, if you live to grow old and yet not old enough. If you like, I will tell you what happened to George Pomfret and his friends. Sit there."

Mr. Pinto, rather subdued, sat; and the young man walked once or twice up and down, his hair flying like a black banner in the wind, turned his face up to the moon to laugh loudly and melodiously, and suddenly said: "They landed on Eynhallow in the quietness of a perfect evening. The tide was talking to the shore, telling it the story of the Seven Seals who went to Sule Skerry, but they could not hear it then. A redshank whistled 'O Joy! look at them!' as they stepped ashore. But they did not know that either. They made a lot of noise as they walked up the shingle beach, and the rabbits in the grass, because they made a noise, were not frightened, but

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only ran a little way and turned to look at them.

"Mrs. Pomfret was not happy, but they let her sit on the rugs and she fell asleep. The others walked round the island—it is not big—and threw stones into the sea. The sea chuckled and threw more stones on to the beach; but they did not know that. And the sea woke birds who were roosting there, and the birds flew round and laughed at them. By and by the shadow of night came—it was not really night—and they sat down to eat. They ate for a long time, and woke Mrs. Pomfret, who said she could never eat out of doors, and so they let her sleep again. The others talked. They were happy, in a way, but what they talked was nonsense. Even Joan, who was in love, talked nonsense which she does not like to think about now."

"Then——" Mr. Pinto excitedly tried to interrupt, but the young man went imperturbably on.

"Disney said one or two things about the birds which were true, but they did not listen to him. And by and by—the hours pass quickly on Midsummer night—it was time to dance. They had taken a gramophone with them, and Joan had found a wide circle of turf, as round as a penny and heavenly smooth, with a square rock beside it. They put the gramophone on the rock and played a fox-trot or some dance like that. Disney and Norah Disney danced together, and Joan danced with Samways. Two or three times they danced, and old Pomfret made jokes and put new records on.

"And then Joan said, 'These aren't proper dances for Eynhallow and Midsummer Eve. I hate them.' And she stopped the gramophone. She picked up

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the second album of records and looked for what she wanted; it was light enough to read the names if she held them close to her eyes. She soon found those she was looking for."

The young man looked doubtfully at Mr. Pinto and asked, "Do you know the music of Grieg?"

"A little of it," said Mr. Pinto. "He composed some Norwegian dances. One of them goes like this." And he whistled a bar or two, tunefully enough.

The young man snapped his fingers joyously and stepped lightly with adept feet on the swaying deck.

"That is it," he cried, and sang some strange-sounding words to the tune. "But Grieg did not make it. He heard it between a pine-forest and the sea and cleverly wrote it down. But it was made hundreds of years ago, when all the earth went dancing, except the trees, and their roots took hold of great rocks and twined round the rocks so that they might not join the dance as they wished. For it was forbidden them, since they had to grow straight and tall that ships might be made out of them."

The young man checked himself. "I was telling you about the Pomfrets," he said.

"Joan found these dances that she loved, and played first one and then the other. She made them all dance to the music, though they did not know what steps were in it, nor in what patterns they should move. But the tunes took them by the heels and they pranced and bowed and jumped, laughing all the time. Old Pomfret capered in the middle, kicking his legs, and twirling round like a top. And he laughed; how he laughed! And when he had done

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shaking with laughter he would start to dance again.

" 'This is too good for Mother to miss,' he said, 'we must wake her and make her dance too.' So they woke Mrs. Pomfret, and there being then six of them they made some kind of a figure and started to dance in earnest. Mrs. Pomfret, once she began, moved as lightly as any of them except Joan, who was like thistledown on the grass and moonlight on the edge of a cloud.

"And then, as the music went on, they found that they were dancing in the proper patterns, for they had partners who had come from nowhere, who led them first to the right and then to the left, up the middle and down the sides, bowing, and knocking their heels in the air. As the tune quickened they turned sometimes head over heels, even Mrs. Pomfret, who held her sides and laughed to see old Pomfret twirling on one toe. And the gramophone never stopped, for a little brown man was sitting by it and now and again turning the handle, and singing loudly as he sat.

"So they danced while the sky became lighter and turned from grey to a shining colour like mackerel; and then little clouds like roses were thrown over the silver, and at last the sun himself, daffodil gold, all bright and new, shot up and sent the other colours packing.

"And everybody shouted and cheered like mad, and for a minute danced more wildly than ever, turning catherine-wheels, fast and faster in a circle, or shouting 'Hey!' and 'Ho!' and 'Ahoi! Ahoi! A-hoi!'

"Then they sank to the ground exhausted, and the

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Pomfrets looked at their partners who had come from nowhere; and were suddenly amazed.

" 'Well, I'm damned!' said old Pomfret, and all the little brown men rolled on the grass and laughed as though they would burst.

" 'Oh, they're the Wee Folk, the Peerie¹ Men!' cried Joan delightedly, clapping her hands. 'Peerie Men, Peerie Men, I've found you at last!'

"And again the little men laughed and hugged themselves on the grass. By and by, still laughing, they drew together and talked among themselves very earnestly, and then the biggest of them, who was as tall as a man's leg to the mid-thigh, went forward, saying his name was Ferriostok, and made a little speech explaining how delighted they were to entertain such charming guests on Eynhallow; and would they please to come in for breakfast?

"Some pushed aside the stone on which the gramophone had been standing and, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, the Pomfrets went down rock stairs to a long, sandy hall, lit greenly by the sea, and full, at that time, of the morning song of the North Tide of Eynhallow. They sat down, talking with their hosts, and then two very old little men brought stone cups full of a yellow liquor that smelt like honey and the first wind after frost. They tasted it, curiously, and old Pomfret—he was a brewer, you know—went red all over and said loudly, 'I'll give every penny I have in the world for the recipe!' For he guessed what it was.

"And the little men laughed louder than ever, and filled his cup again. One said, 'The Great King

¹ Peerie: Little.

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offered us Almain for it eleven hundred years ago. We gave him one cup for love, and no more. But you, who have brought that music with you, are free to our cellar. Stay and drink with us, and to-night we shall dance again.'

"No one of them had any thought of going, for it was heather ale they drank. Heather ale! And the last man who tasted it was Thomas of Ercildoune. It was for heather ale that the Romans came to Britain, having heard of it in Gaul, and they pushed northwards to Mount Graupius in search of the secret. But they never found it. And now old Pomfret was swilling it, his cheeks like rubies, because Joan had brought back to the Peerie Men the music they had lost six hundred years before, when their oldest minstrel died of a mad otter's bite.

"Disney was talking to an old grey seal at the sea-door, hearing new tales of the German war, and Joan was listening to the Reykjavik story of the Solan Geese which three little men told her all together, so excited they were by her beauty and by the music she had brought them. At night they danced again, and Joan learnt the Weaving of the Red Ware, the dance that the red shore-seaweed makes for full-moon tides. The Peerie Men played on fiddles cut out of old tree-roots, with strings of rabbit-gut, and they had drums made of shells and rabbit-skins scraped as thin as tissue with stone knives. They hunt quietly, and that is why the rabbits are frightened of silence, but were not afraid of the Pomfrets, who made a noise when they walked. The Peerie Men's music was thin and tinkly, though the tunes were as strong and sweet as the heather ale itself, and always they turned

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again to the gramophone which Joan had brought, and danced as madly as peewits in April, leaping like winter spray, and clapping their heels high in the air. They danced the Merry Men of Mey and the slow sad Dance of Lofoden, so that everybody wept a little. And then they drank more ale and laughed again, and as the sun came up they danced the Herring Dance, weaving through and through so fast that the eye could not follow them.

"Now this was the third sunrise since the Pomfrets had gone to the island, for the first day and the second night and the second day had passed like one morning in the sandy hall of the Little Men; so many things were there to hear, and such good jokes an old crab made, and so shockingly attractive was a mermaid story that the afternoon tide told. Even the sand had a story, but it was so old that the Peerie Men themselves could not understand it, for it began in darkness and finished under a green haze of ice. And since the Pomfrets were so busy there they heard no sound of the chauffeur's visit and the Peerie Men said nothing of it. They had taken below all the rugs and cushions and hampers and gramophone records, and brushed the grass straight, so that no trace was left of the Midsummer dancing—except the tag of Joan's stocking-suspender, which was overlooked, so it seems.

"The old grey seal told them, in the days that followed, of all that was going on by land, and even Mrs. Pomfret laughed to hear of the bustle and stir they had created. There was no need, the Peerie Men found, to make them hide when more searchers came, for none of the Pomfrets had any wish to be

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found. Disney said he was learning something about the sea for the first time in his life (and he had followed the sea all his life), and Norah sang Iceland cradle-songs all day. Old Pomfret swilled his ale, glowing like a ruby in the green cave, and Joan—Joan was the queen of the Peerie Men, and the fosterling of the old grumbling sand, and the friend of every fish that passed by the sea-door. And at night they danced, to the music of tree-root fiddles and pink shell-drums, and above all to that music which you think was made by Grieg. They danced, I tell you! . . .”

The young man tossed up his arms and touched his fingers above his head; he placed the flat of his foot on the calf of the other leg; twirled rapidly on his toes. “Danced, I say! Is there anything in the world but dancing?” And he clapped his heels together, high in the air, first to one side and then to the other, singing something fast and rhythmic and melodious.

Mr. Pinto coughed nervously—he was feeling cold—and said: “That is an extraordinarily interesting story. But, if you will pardon my curiosity, do you mind telling me what reason you have for thinking that this actually happened to Mr. Pomfret and his friends?”

“Reason!” said the young man, staring at him. His hair blew out on the wind like a black banner, and he laughed loud and melodiously.

“This reason,” he said, “that I am Otto Samways!” And he turned, very neatly, a standing somersault on the deck and came up laughing.

“They sent me away to buy something,” he said, “and when I have bought it I am going back to

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Eynhallow to dance the Merry Men, and the Herring Dance, and the Sea Moon's Dance with Joan."

And once again he sang, very melodiously, and turned a rapid series of catherine-wheels along the deck.

"To buy what?" shouted Mr. Pinto, as he disappeared.

"Gramophone needles!" bellowed the young man, laughing uproariously.

BY
JOHN MACNAIR REID



BLUE EYES

WE WERE in the habit of meeting at three o'clock each afternoon, and three o'clock in Glasgow is the popular hour for funerals. Perhaps it was the consciousness of this that made me, almost abruptly, inform her of my uncle's death when we met one pleasant afternoon in May. The intimation was her first news of the existence of an uncle and now he did no longer exist. She widened her round blue eyes and tucked her chin in the supporting cup her interlacing fingers made, and whispered "How awful!"

That, indeed, was awful; but it was my own fault. A man so dear to me as my uncle ought to have been made known to the girl I meant to marry. There had seemed to be no hurry, however, and, in respect to my uncle, I had felt that a little deeper intimacy between Jenny and me was necessary before the introduction was made. Now it was impossible. I shifted my chair nearer to hers and began to describe the wonderful man that man had been. When I had finished, her dear blue eyes were rimmed with dew. "Poor old Jim," she whispered, and our hands sought each other's furtively under the tablecloth.

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She arrived on the next afternoon full of her own enthusiasms and with a host of delightful tittle-tattle to be discussed as we sat in the café of the New Picture House in Sauchiehall Street. Then, when all her news had been divulged, where had I spent the last twenty-four hours? Had I been happy? Had I been true to her?

The time for me, I said, had been sombre enough. My uncle, you know; and yesterday's gentle light reappeared in her eyes. Oh, amazingly blue they were. "Yes, of course," she nodded.

She had now to be informed that I would not be able to see her on the following afternoon and at this her eyes widened again. She had not considered the embarrassment of a funeral.

"And won't I see you at all to-morrow, then?" she inquired.

"Oh, surely, some time."

"I must see you; poor dear, a funeral is a horrid thing."

It was a peak in the range of my experiences when, on accepting this speech from her, I thought of that sane, shrewd-eyed man in his blinded bedroom awaiting the tribute of the final offices from his loved ones and friends. . . . Yet I had never spoken of him to her until he had died and her want of interest was justified in my mind.

Thinking of this afterwards when our swift hour was sped, and I was back at my work, I could not imagine this slim thing of a girl with her blue eyes, her fussy little powder-puff, her tiny mirror, with the unmirrorable flickerings and waverings of light from her restless fingers, as the hostess of death or its

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ambassador, sickness. Was there one word she ordinarily uttered which would have been even as much as attractive to my dead uncle? His blue eyes, in which the light of day was always drawn and drained to a point and merged in the impression of intelligence, that had so fascinated me, would have looked upon her dancing eyes with their one eternal expression, now shaded, now bright, now light, now dull, and have discovered—what?

Having refused to contemplate the proceedings and, therefore, having passed from one stage to another, prompted only by what I saw others doing or about to do, the actual drive to the cemetery and the slow procession along three little aisles between marble-margined grass beds had had all the distraction of first impressions. As we went along I endeavoured to look around me, over the collar, as it were, over the rim of the stifling grief that gripped me. On looking into the white spikes of tombstones, whose irregularity in many rows created a sombre density, I was aware of great white bulging clouds suspended far below the heaven's blue; where green grass was growing I noticed jars and small blue vases pushed into the ground; and where gravel surfaced a grave's earth I noticed the slenderest shoots of wayward green. Before me, in the presence of bare-headed men, the brown coffin was being borne along to its prepared place; and when I caught sight in the distance of bare-armed men with rough clothes, caught sight of the mud-stained planks around a heap of earth, the fear of death, now having been stilled for four days, came back as violent and

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palpitating as in those moments when my brother and I had stood outside the room during an ominous lull in the movement that had been going on for hours.

I slipped the collar of grief, became young again as I had been when grief came to me: young with all my old reservations upon the traditions and warnings of my elders, and all my old incredulity at death. The place became stark in the white diamond brilliance of sunless daylight. The black coats of the mourners, the dark greys of the grave-diggers dazed my eyes in the sudden clarity of the air, in the breathless, windless, soundless tension of the moment. Someone handed me a cord, thrust it into my awkward hand, and focusing my attention on this, the downward movement of my eyes brought a temporary blur of tears.

My father was at the top and to my left, my brother opposite me; suspended by a cluster of cords and quickly passing down his narrow cell was my uncle. The flutter of falling cords followed and, thinking to have the very, the absolutely last contact with him, I held my cord till all the others fell. A heavy clump of earth dropped with a low thud as though on an empty box, and then a voice broke out into the rustlings of the trees and a droop of heads flashed on my eyes as so many flickerings. The voice rose and fell as though blown about by the breeze; it rose in strengthening cadences and then spilt, like a tipped-up shell, its sound upon us. I stood, acutely aware of one's unawareness making me, intensely sustained, responsive to the remotest impression. At my side the quiet man who is my father had broken his calm with a vivid "Ah, God!" which was

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for me like the click of a camera that took a picture of him for ever. Opposite, my brother stood, serious-looking, quiet, composed. His eyes were dry, and when once he looked over to us, for my father and I had by this time somehow got huddled together, the light of the day blanketed the familiar blue, yet could not destroy the look of somewhat anxious surprise. . . . And still the voice went mournfully on. . . .

At the foot, and beyond the foot, and upon the path, and beyond the path, and around the neighbouring stones, were assembled the outer ring of the dead man's friends; men of business and men of far out relationship who, preserving an ancient custom of their fathers among the hills, were paying their last respects to their friend. Among that company, but now a little nearer us, for he had been given a cord, there stood a great man. We had heard his name five thousand times, maybe, in twenty years. He was a director of "the firm."

His eyes were blue. In all these five thousand times that fact had never been mentioned. He was a long thin man, correctly dressed, with a wide white collar opening out upon a rather pointed chin, and above, a narrow nose which supported rimless glasses before his eyes. They were strange eyes to me, and therefore their peculiar blue was noticeable. And when I glanced downwards at him that blue faced me, lacking the anxious and the serious dryness of my brother's opposite, but reproducing, and hardened by the blue, the dry surprise.

It was then that I noticed a movement of my father's, and on turning still a little nearer to him

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was clutched by a shaking hand. I gripped it in return and continued my spellbound gaze on those blue eyes. Other heads were bowed and the voice was going on; the trees were standing against blue-white skies and the myriad headstones stood like petrified ghosts upon their shaded greens; an air was about our bare heads and a lark, risen from a graveless green beyond, was mounting an aerial chain of song. Alone above the scene were those blue eyes.

Alone, for my father, and I who saw them, were with that coffin. To reply to their surprise would have been to confute the cause of surprise, and neither them nor the blue serenity of heaven above could have made me do that. That blue look which to the silent man below had for years and years been connected with invoices and orders and the recovery of bad debts, with salary and management, with blankets and linen and cotton, were, for me, in this open air, the eyes of that world which from the days when I learned things at my mother's knees had been described as hard. In his coach on the way thither he had been discussing business: stocks and shares and the rubber markets especially, oh, I know it; and at the same time the dress was ceremonial, the rimless eyeglasses precise and minutely correct. Underneath that coat of black was a waistcoat with pockets containing precise things, a fountain pen, a patent pencil, a notecase. Those blue eyes! what miserable clerks had looked on them when being sacked in a cold, methodical way? The dry surprise, the clean rimless glasses. . . .

Those glasses were superb. They added with a scrupulous absence of adornment a little of man's

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invention, a small amount of artificiality that protected him from any betrayal of humanness the poor naked eyes might have made. Providing an aid to his imperfect sight they heightened the efficient and commercial appearance of the man. They and the stereotyped clothes preserved him for his world and his caste; and while the minister's droning voice interminably went on, his blue eyes fixed us with a stare.

The agitation of us both—my father and I—had sent its reverberation throughout the company; men stirred and eyelids fluttered, and acquaintances a little removed, ill at ease and wishing the episode closed, looked over the heads of those opposite to far-away skies. No one looked our way, none saw us, though all were aware of us; none save that man who directed upon us the gaze of those cold, unshifting, steady, surprised blue eyes. The man on whose soil we were standing, the man on whose polished coffin the first of its eternal weight of clay had fallen, would, had he been among us, have joined with eyes as steady and eyes as blue in that surprised gaze. "What are you bothering about?" he would have asked, and left us in doubt as to his real opinion of us by a slight shrug of his shoulders.

That was the thing. The etiquette of the graveside to these people was as severe and inelastic a thing as office etiquette or drawing-room etiquette. "What are you bothering about?" Well, then, if immortality be an improbable creed; if emotion is a vulgar thing and a show of emotion at a grave's edge a breach of decorum, an attack on the sensibilities of business gentlemen and an unfair advantage over

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the dead below, we indeed are but the flimsiest shadows, the vaguest of unsubstantial things that flitter over the earth. For thus we overcome our yearning by denying immortality and see the flesh perish, and thus we chasten the spirit until, straining as on a leash, it watches mutely a ceremony of make believe.

The voice trickled from the surface of the calm air and silence flowed into and over the tiny furrow it had made. A movement of black arms swept slowly round me as hats were replaced and men stepped stiffly backwards. I alone remained where I had been and watched the coffin slowly disappear below a rising swell of earth. And then, when the wreaths were clustered in their final setting on the top, we wound our way along the narrow aisles to the waiting cars.

The air was throbbing with that lark's song somewhere in a field's sky nearby. Outside the gates, a little removed and out of the way of traffic, I knew that by this time my little blue-eyed lady would be expecting me. "What are you bothering about, indeed!" The lark will be there all the other days of May, all June and most July. But its song has been changed for me for ever, and now it conjures up blue eyes as well as blue skies, and below the level of its undeviating lyricism is the dull sound of earth as it falls and falls on polished oak.

BY
GEORGE BLAKE



THE COASTS OF NORMANDY

I

I KNOW NOT how many million chances there were against the amazing one that I, who knew Lilian Maxwell so well, should foregather on the shores of Normandy with Captain Hippolyte Blondel. Call it a fantastic chance, if you please: the thing happened. I, who knew Lilian Maxwell so very well, met on the beach at Grèves-les-Fleurs that vivid little man, Captain Hippolyte Blondel, and that was the beginning of the story—or the end, if you prefer it; and now, for better or for worse, I must tell it as simply as I can.

Twenty years ago I was a boy in a Scottish seaport town. We lived there in a flat of seven rooms, for which, I remember to have heard, my father paid a rent of fifty-five pounds a year. It was such a flat as rich men would pay ten times as much for in London to-day; for these seven rooms were large and high, the entrance hall (which we called the lobby) was spacious in a truer sense than any house-agent ever used the word, and the walls were solid: three feet of good yellow sandstone. Our windows looked out on a street lined with sycamores and

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limes, and the quiet of the district, on the southern edge of the town three hundred feet above the sea, was such that I cannot think of it now without a longing to return.

But if ours on the ground floor was a splendid flat, the one above was more desirable still. Our neighbours, the Maxwells, had on their entrance floor much the same accommodation as ourselves, but they enjoyed moreover a range of four large attic rooms. How I envied the Maxwell boys those tremendous playgrounds, those sloping walls, and the flat windows that opened out on the roof to reveal a magnificent panorama of the anchorage and the Highland hills beyond! You may be sure that my particular friendship with Harry Maxwell gave me the frequent freedom of the attics, where we played strange boys' games among the litter of the lumber room, produced romances in our toy theatre, stained our fingers with hypo and metol-quinol or, in madder moments, crawled out on the sloping, slated roof to feed the pigeons which Harry's older brother, Alec, kept in a cote in the lee of a chimney-stack.

There were three boys in each family, and we paired very much according to age, but I think the affinity between Harry and myself was deeper than could be accounted for by the fact that we were in the same form at the Grammar School. We were romantics: we were of infinitely more imaginative cast than our older brothers. They would laugh at us for little asses, but we could draw serious swords for Scotland at Bannockburn in the garden, or bend English bows at Creçy from behind Mr. Maxwell's pile of winter manure. I carry a scar where Robert

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the Bruce smote me in my capacity of the rash and insolent de Bohun. One day we came on the body of a drowned man in the skating pond, the bloated silly body of a drunken clerk, staring at the sky, and I know that our mutual confessions of terror and sleepless nights bound me to Harry Maxwell by a stronger chain of love and understanding than I have ever shared with any other man. And he was a joy to look upon, this little boy; even then I saw and delighted in his beauty. His hair was wavy-fair and shone in the sun, he carried his finely-shaped head as if he were proud, and his eyes were of a remarkably deep and penetrating blue.

These features he got from his mother. Lilian Maxwell was a strange flower to find in the ordered fields of Scottish middle-class life. There was a strain of Norse in her, I fancy, but she bore herself with the trim air one has learned to associate with the Frenchwoman. Years ahead of her time, she had caused her bright, fair hair to be shingled, so that one saw the beauty of the neck that carried a small and shapely head. In profile she seemed, however stately, too vivacious and shining to be the mother of three grown boys, but it was when you looked full in the face that you saw maturity, aloofness, wisdom. She always seemed to be frowning ever so little, and there was an uncomfortable power of penetration in her deep-set eyes. There was in these eyes such a glint as I have seen in a blue butterfly's wing set under crystal. The chance acquaintance invariably wrote her down bad-tempered, but I, the friend of her youngest boy, knew that that was not the truth about Lilian Maxwell.

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She was a silent woman. A smile, a light hand on my head—it was not often that I got more from Harry's mother. Yet I knew that there was a great warmth of feeling in her, and that the enigmatic quality of her derived from some mysterious and (to me then) inexplicable intensity of inner life. I worshipped her.

No doubt she shone more strangely in that provincial environment than she would have done in a metropolis. Indeed, she stood out so brilliantly against a rather drab background that there was always a strain of uneasiness in the attitude of her neighbours towards her. The women called her "odd," because she was fond of wearing bright blue stuffs severely cut and, perhaps more truly, because she was not one to share the gossip and confidences of the average housekeeping female. In a phrase, she was in that small suburban world and not of it. Save for that untraceable strain of Scandinavian blood her descent was purely Scots, and yet she was a foreigner among us.

All the more remarkable was such individuality in one whose fate in life it was to be the wife of that very decent little man, John Maxwell. "Decent"—I feel I have explained him in a word. He was commonplace in everything: his appearance, his clothes, his interests. Good nature, respectability, temperance, industry—all the social virtues were in the equipment of John Maxwell and failed to make him interesting. You liked him, but only when you noticed him, and that was not often. For myself, I think I got closer to him than most people, since I was, out of sympathy for his simplicity and un-

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• pretentiousness, sorry for him in an awkward fashion and would listen patiently while he enlarged, as was his habit, on some small fact that had interested him.

He was a man whose education had been of the most rudimentary character, so that he found excitement in the acquisition of knowledge. (Did I call him uninteresting? At least he was remarkable for this willingness to be enthralled by material facts.) For instance, he would read somewhere that water is a chemical compound of two gases, or that a certain star is so many hundreds of light-years away—the sort of fact that, even in my day, the schoolboy accepted without wonder.

I can hear him now. He has me at his mercy in the little room where he sat at nights smoking his pipe.

“You see, George, it’s like this. You take a beam of light. See? But it’s not just a beam—not a sort of pencil arrangement. It’s a wave—like if you jerk a long piece of rope and set it waggling. Well, you see, George, light’s like that, if you get me, and it travels at a given speed. What is it now? Where’s that wee book. Aye, here it is . . . one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second. Just think of that! That’s quicker than a motor car by a long chalk: quicker than you can think. Well—take this light-year business. You see, if light travels all that number of miles in a second, how many miles will it travel in a year? Millions, billions, trillions! Now, see here, George . . .”

So he would expatiate, his eyes searching yours for a sign that you shared his wonder. For hours on end I had to listen to him while he drooled away

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about the elementary facts that were for him the very core of scientific truth. It was beyond him to realize that what he explained at such great length was not always a shattering novelty to his victims. There was no subtlety about John Maxwell, coal merchant in Garvel. He was simple and he meant well, but he was a devastating bore.

To think that this John and Lilian Maxwell should ever have been man and wife—he with his little pot belly so near to the earth, with his complete lack of poise and subtlety: she so decorative, so full of mysterious personality! God knows that love is a catalyst that works strangely, but seldom more oddly has it acted than in this case. Economic necessity? Pity? Loneliness on one side or the other? One gropes for some plausible explanation of their mating and gropes in vain. But they did not, in the days of which I write, represent for me a psychological problem. Then they were simply Harry's mother and father—officials, so to speak, rather than individuals—and they would have remained so had not a dreadful thing happened to break the chain that bound them specially to me.

Harry was killed. Returning from school one day he darted across the street to hail his mother, and before her eyes was run over by Colonel Malcolm's heavy Panhard, then the pride of our small community. I saw them bring him home—and did not for many hours thereafter understand what had happened to me. My mother has told me that I did not cry: only turned white and crept away to my room. And I remember that I lay awake most of that night, my mind divided between the effort to realize my

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loss and a too vivid picture of the bruised body of my friend lying in the room above. "Harry!" I called to him once in a whisper through the darkness, then in terror covered my head with the bedclothes.

Yes, it was fear that held me during those first twelve hours of bereavement, but next morning I went up among the whins on the hill behind the house and sat there, staring with smarting eyes over the Firth to the Lennox hills. The anchorage was bright with the white and red sails of some local regatta, and it seemed to me very queer and sad that people should be active and happy while Harry was lying dead. It was a day of sunlight and heavy cloud such as is common on the West Coast, and the great shadows of the cumulus-masses swept processionally across the bronze slopes of those distant hills. That was the sight which, somehow, brought home to me with poignant, sweet pain the fact of my new loneliness in a great world; and then at last I bowed my face to the grass and cried and cried for what I had irrevocably lost.

That grief of mine, however, did not count for much in the public orgy of mourning that followed Harry's death. Why should the good burgher think of a heartbroken little boy when life presents him with a golden opportunity to give Platitude her head? . . . But one must not be cynical, one must not be unfair. The simple feel as warmly as the clever and the learned. What if they do luxuriate a thought excessively in solemn catchwords and the sentiments of sympathy? What if the panoply of interment offers them a thrill which they eagerly experience? The worn coin has its mint value to the end. And

yet it is bitterly amusing to recall the things they said, these good neighbours of ours, about Harry and his people. There were phrases that became popular. Dr. Dinsmuir had said in the Golf Club that the boy's spine had "snapped like a bamboo twig," and the phrase was adopted by all who spoke of the accident. "Aye, a broken spine, poor wee chap," you would hear them say, "snapped like a bamboo twig." The simile was vivid and authoritative, and it served to cover the whole nature of Harry's injuries. I remember again that the Reverend Mr. Graham, praying extempore as is the Scots custom, borrowed from Ecclesiastes to adorn his references to the event, and for days thereafter every discussion of the affair was apt to end with some allusion to the silver cord being loosed and the golden bowl being broken—all in a sighing, unctuous tone. Even the details of the funeral arrangements became public property, and the very postman knew that Harry's coffin was to be of oak with silver handles—solid silver, said the postman—and that the interment was like to cost his father the most of sixty pounds.

Born in any other house in our street I should certainly have been made to play a picturesque part in these proceedings. Few mothers of that class could have resisted the temptation to acquire merit by dramatizing their son as chief mourner outside the family. They would have sent me up, half-hidden under flowers, to "see the body"; they would have rigged me out in Eton suit and bowler hat to accompany the elders in a heavy carriage to the cemetery. But I was lucky in my parents, who forbade anything but the sending of a modest wreath, and suffered me

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only to peep through the slats of the lowered Venetian blinds at the small coffin being borne out to the hearse—as all our neighbours for a hundred yards up and down the street were peeping from behind the lowered symbols of conventional respect.

Oddly enough, it is not that scene which stands out most vividly in my memories of the day. At that time the real I was numb with grief and fear, and he who peered vulgarly through the Venetian blinds was just an averagely inquisitive small boy. Far more poignantly I remember the return home of John Maxwell and his two remaining sons. A footpath from the cemetery ran down the face of the hill opposite our drawing-room windows, and I could weep now to remember how weak and pitiful and lonely looked these three figures, black in their mourning against the green hillside. It surprised me greatly that they should be talking as they approached the house; it seemed to me that their lives must now be empty and hopeless; and I was oddly disappointed to realize that their faces, closely and coolly regarded, were as I had always known them. Morbidly I looked for the marks of tears, and they were not to be seen. It was then, I think, I realized for the first time the terrible loneliness of death.

The last of that afternoon's events was foreshadowed by the appearance of my mother in the room where I sat alone brooding. She had been with Harry's mother during her hours of loneliness, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Mr. Maxwell wants to see you, Georgie," she said. "You might run away up now like a good boy—and don't stay long."

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She need not have been afraid of that, for I climbed the Maxwells' stairs in terror and would have bounded down again at the faintest whisper of recall. I suppose I was afraid of the spectacle of grief, of the difficulties of a reunion after an episode so tragic, but I need not have worried. John Maxwell, still in his stiff funeral garments, it is true, was moving about the little schoolroom in which Harry and I had often played. He welcomed me almost casually.

"That you, George? Good boy. Here——"

He could speak so naturally as that! My fear began to drop from me. He was picking books from the shelves.

"Here, George. 'Here's a few wee things of Harry's his mother and me would like you to take. These books—and that yacht over there. He—he would have liked you to have them. There's other things. . . . We haven't just had the time to sort things out. That model railway in the attic. No, no! Not a word now. He—he would have liked you to have them. Harry. . . . Take them, Georgie, and run away now. I'll see about the rest. Some time . . ."

Gently he pushed me, my arms full, from the room and, tongue-tied, I stumbled out into the hall. One moment I was alone out there; the next a woman's arms were about me and I felt warm lips pressing mine in a swift, feverish kiss. Harry's mother.

"Don't forget him, Georgie," she sobbed.

Then I was blundering my way down the stairs through a mist of tears.

The burial of Harry, you may be sure, did not

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close the tragic episode so far as our neighbours were concerned. There came to them the opportunity of watching and commenting on what would nowadays be called the reactions of the bereaved family. "They have a heavy cross to bear," was a phrase greatly in vogue immediately after the funeral. "It's put years on his age," they said of poor John Maxwell: not quite truthfully, I think. Probably gossip was more accurate in its estimate of the effect of the tragedy on his wife. . . . "O, it's been a terrible blow to her. She's more standoffish and queer than ever. As if she'd like to kill you with those eyes of hers." Being a person out of the ordinary, Lilian Maxwell could not be fitted with a ready-made label.

But they spoke truly, our gossips. Lilian Maxwell had been dealt a terrible blow; and she did look as if she could kill you with those eyes of hers. She took to the alarming habit of pacing the garden paths as if she were pursued by ghosts, as if she were forever hurrying to leave pain and sorrow behind her. It went on like that for nearly a week.

Then came a day when my mother and I were together at the window.* It was the forenoon of the Saturday following the day of the funeral. A four-wheeler drew up before the side gate, which was the Maxwell's entrance to their flat. Jock, the familiar cabby of our neighbourhood, was on the box and, after a glance at the windows above us, loosed his reins and settled down to wait.

"Who's travelling, I wonder?" my mother said.

As if in answer Jock gathered his reins again, raised his whip, and let his face relax in the famous

grin of welcome.

"Gracious! It's Mrs. Maxwell," exclaimed my mother.

The exclamation was at the fact that Lilian Maxwell went alone. She carried a biggish suit-case as she hurried down the gravel path, and there was hardly a pause for a word of command before the door of the cab had closed behind her and Jock had clucked to his horse and was turning down the road.

"That's odd," I heard my mother say, as if to herself. "The boys out and the maid away and Mr. Maxwell at his work."

Suddenly she remembered her duty as an adult. "Run you out and play now, George. I don't want you mooning about the house all morning."

Thus was I dismissed; and had I been a different sort of boy, I would, no doubt, have forthwith forgotten what had just passed. It was not in me then to understand the implications of my mother's comments on Lilian Maxwell's departure; but she had said too much or, at least, implied too much by a mere inflexion of her voice. I went away to play, but it was in a vaguely disturbed frame of mind. Something strange, it seemed to me all too clearly, was happening upstairs, and, because I worshipped Harry's mother and respected John Maxwell, I could hardly bear to think of new trouble coming upon or between these two. When John Maxwell came home about one o'clock that day, I watched him from the bath-room window as one gazes with surmise upon a celebrity or a lunatic, and when I heard the door of their flat slam to I listened, in vain, for melodramatic noises from above,

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Let it be clear that this vague depression of mine passed from me quickly and within the space of twelve hours was forgotten utterly. I remember that I spent a very happy afternoon cheering our local cricket eleven to victory over Grange, those formidable men from Edinburgh; and when I returned in the evening for tea—the genuine, rich high tea of the Scots middle classes—there was John Maxwell in the garden, hard at work over the potted plants which, set in a soldierly row against the northern wall, were his particular pride and anxiety.

My mother was at the window watching him, and when I came in she spoke cunningly.

"There's Mr. Maxwell in the garden, George. Away out and have a word with him. He likes to see you."

This was the guile of woman, but I was innocent, and out I went to see my friend.

"Hello, Georgie!" he greeted me, stretching himself erect and drawing a sleeve across his damp brow. "Here I am, back at the gardening again. Fine work for a bachelor it is, too."

I laughed self-consciously, but with a cheerfulness that could not be suspected he went on to explain.

"Mebbe ye saw Mrs. Maxwell go off this morning? Aye, well, she's gone for a week or two. It was kind of sudden-like. I didn't quite . . . Ye see, Georgie, she just couldn't bear it here for a bit after. . . . Perhaps your mother was wondering? Or did she not mention it? Well, any way, she just had to go. She's away to London for a bit, to a sister of hers. You might just tell your mother in case she

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would like to know. She's been very kind about our bit of trouble, your mother has, and mebbe she would be wondering. . . . Here, Georgie, you might just run and fill this watering-can till I give these carnations a drink."

So closed the incident of Harry Maxwell's sudden death. When his mother did return in due course the neighbours, I think, had largely forgotten the dramatic circumstances of her going. Perhaps something else had happened to distract them. To me, however, Lilian Maxwell seemed more interesting, lonelier, and further from the realities than ever. You will remember that I was peculiarly sensitive in my strange relationship with her; and I watched her closely. It was about that time that the loveliness of James Hogg's "Kilmeny" was putting its first spell upon me, and I have never read the poem since without seeing in my mental picture of that sad, strange heroine the features and spirit of the mother of my friend. I remember her from those days as a sort of ghost, who did nothing but smile faintly and pat my head whenever she met me.

II

And now I must pause to ask myself if I have painted a true portrait of Lilian Maxwell. What I have just set down is written in the light of subsequent events, the strange nature of which (as I shall describe) set me raking among the dusty lumber of distant recollection. Until I met Captain Hippolyte Blondel, Lilian Maxwell was for twenty years nothing to me but a gentle memory, and it may be

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that, looking back on a sudden inspiration over so many crowded and troubled years, I have sentimentalized the portrait of a woman I admired as a boy. It is a temptation that besets the best of us. We are all given to the habit of looking back on life through the wrong end of the telescope, so that what is furthest away from us seems inexpressibly sweet and colourful and innocent—*mignon* is perhaps the word I want. It may be, I say, that something of this disproportion crept into my vision of Lilian Maxwell as years and miles and passions separated us. However . . .

It was in July of the year before last that we took the boys on holiday to Grèves-les-Fleurs. That village fills the mouth of one of those wooded glens that cut down through the chalk from the rich Norman plateau to the sea. It is a charming little place, with so many 'half-timbered houses, flowery lanes, and so much sweet honeysuckle and so many rambling roses round the doors, that the English visitor has the feeling of being in Sussex rather than in France. Our chief interests on this family holiday, however, were mainly in the beach, a fairish crescent of sand and shingle at the mouth of the glen with the high cliffs for horns. There the boys played the livelong day, while in a long chair in the shadow of a groyne I drowsed over *The Times*, or watched with 'philosophic calm the antics of the French *bourgeoisie*. An hour on the beach at Grèves-les-Fleurs, I used to think, would be for the celibate the beginning of a liberal education in the less picturesque intimacies of family life.

It was while sitting there with a pleasurably empty

mind that I had my first glimpse of Hippolyte Blondel. My little family of mother, nurse, and two small boys were down at the water's edge, playing about one of the fishing dories that rocked there to the touch of the green Channel seas. Suddenly I became aware that they were apparently engaged in altercation with a smallish man in a blue suit and brown felt hat, who, while plainly not a fisherman, seemed at a distance to be proclaiming with vehemence a proprietorial interest in the boat and some resentment of the fact that a three-year-old had scrambled into the stern-sheets. It was a comic little group to see across two hundred yards of sand, and I watched it idly for a time, until a vague concern over the length and seeming gravity of the interview dragged me from my chair to play the proper part of husband and father in the quarrel.

It was no quarrel, I quickly realized on approaching within earshot, for the little stranger was laughing merrily and talking rapidly in fluent, if idiosyncratic English.

"Scotch, be damn!" he was cackling joyfully. "You are Scotch! I know Scotland—all of it! It's a braw brikt moonlikt nikt the nikt. No?"

He gazed around him with pleasure in the discovery of mutual acquaintance and in the chance of displaying his knowledge of the idiom. His was a hard-bitten face with high cheek-bones and puckered lines about the bright little eyes. These fixed me and placed me at once. With a shout he welcomed me to the conference.

"I tell your wife here I know Scotland. Know Scotland well, be damn! Edimbourg—Glasgow—

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Dundee—Ardrossan——” There he stressed the wrong syllables—“By Chris’, I know Scotland. I tell you . . .”

He proceeded to tell us. For twenty minutes at a stretch he gabbled and cackled in his anxiety to strengthen this happy bond with chance acquaintances of the beach. He had been, it appeared, a sailor. “Twenty-seven year, be damn, I sail in ships, everywhere. I am—you call it?—master mariner. Capitaine Blondel, Hippolyte Blondel.” The claim was palpably sound. Of his stories of adventure in the Americas and the East I had no means of gauging the truth, but the man did know the ports of Britain, intimately. “London! I love London, but I love better the River above. When in London I go on Saturday afternoon to Goring, to—you call it?—Pangbourne, to Maidenhead. Lovely! Sweet up there, is it not? And”—herè he winked broadly—“I find pretty girls and drink whisky. No?” Again: “Glasgow! You say Glasgow? Pah! Glasgow a ploody dirty ’ole. Saukie’ all Street, be damn! No! I like the leedle places—Dunoon, Largs, the Kyles of Bute! Lovely these—and nice girls.”

I cannot tell you a fraction of what he said that morning, but it was diverting stuff to listen to. Captain Blondel was garrulous, vain, and vulgar, but he had a sailor’s knowledge of the world, and that is an amazing thing. One did not quite like the man; somehow one suspected him, for all his garrulity, to be lacking in candour; but he was a rich personality, a comic character—so frèe, indeed, in his anecdotes according to the Anglo-Saxon convention that in due course the women moved discreetly towards where

the family chairs and wraps were lying. Captain Blondel and I followed them slowly up the beach, and now, for once, he was silent, his bright little eyes on the figures of the women ahead.

"Your wife have very fine legs, by Chris'l!" he said suddenly but gravely. "I never see legs so fine."

It was hardly a subject for discussion with a British husband, and one reared by Presbyterian standards at that, but I could not help laughing. He did not join me. This was for him apparently a serious topic, and he went on quite solemnly, almost reproachfully.

"But it is true! Very fine legs. And the little nurse—she have very fine legs, too. I like the short skirts to see the fine legs." It was then that he permitted himself a cackle of laughter and added blithely: "And when the wind blows . . . *Pouff!*"

He dug me in the ribs, turned away, and with a merry "See you soon" was off towards the village.

Captain Blondel was for a day or two thereafter a joke between my wife and myself. It subtly flatters the vanity of the most insular among us to make a friend of a foreigner, and as between spouses the remarks about the legs were too good to be forgotten at once. This curiosity of ours, indeed, led us towards local information concerning Captain Blondel. For instance, Madame at the hotel knew him: knew all about him; but the French are masters of implication, and we were left to guess at our hostess's true estimate of the man. It emerged, however, that his claim to be a master mariner was sound. He had, in sober truth, spent more than twenty years at sea. We were allowed to gather, moreover, that our Blondel was rich, having amassed a competence in

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the capacity of marine superintendent of a line of coasting steamers plying from Rouen. Lastly—and this was tactfully conveyed to my wife in my absence—it would be all to the good if our nurse were to decline any invitation to walk on the cliffs with him she might receive from our friend on the beach.

These hints were deftly conveyed, but it became clear that, however dubiously Captain Blondel was regarded by the respectable of Grèves-les-Fleurs, he yet remained a force and a personality among them; and I confess that I was mischievously inclined to cultivate the acquaintance. The opportunity came to me very shortly when, having strolled down to the sea-wall one evening after dinner, I found him staring out over turbulent, inshore waves towards an angry sunset. He greeted me readily enough, but not with the heartiness I had expected, and it was left to me to break the ice with reminiscent talk of the Clyde and its shipping.

"The Clyde, by Chris'!" he interjected moodily. "I know your bloody Clyde."

Surely this was a different man from him we had met on the beach two days ago. Now he seemed almost sour, certainly glum, and I began to wonder if he regretted his garrulity at our first meeting.

"I have thought much about the Clyde since we meet the other day," he grumbled. "You come from Garvel, is it not so? I know Garvel."

It was as if he voiced a grievance against my native town: as if he had been brooding on Garvel for an hour before; and his glumness puzzled and slightly confused me, who had expected him to gabble as usual.

"Indeed?" I managed to say. "What's wrong with Garvel?"

"Nothing wrong with Garvel. Nothing, be damn! A lovely town. I love Garvel. But, by Chris', I met there the loveliest girl I ever knew, and when I think——"

Suddenly he broke off, and a mechanical smile of greeting formed itself about his lips, and I turned to see my wife approaching us.

"Some time I tell you," he whispered intensely. "Damn fonny story it is."

There was nothing more to be had from him that night, of course, but you may be sure that I was excited by the promise of a reminiscence that would certainly involve places I knew and loved and, perchance, people of my or my father's acquaintance. The coincidence was too delightful to be dismissed, and for days thereafter I haunted the crooked main street of Grèves-lès-Fleurs, the delicious lanes on the slopes above, and the beach, all in the hope and with the deliberate intention of pinning Captain Blondel in some quiet corner and drawing that story of Garvel from him. But for days on end the short figure in the blue suit was not to be seen. I discovered his house, a pleasant enough villa on the hill, but saw no more than the distinctly forbidding face of an elderly woman I judged to be his cook at an attic window. The tiny Casino opened for the season, but though the absurd, hundred-yard terrace was crowded nightly with the population of Grèves-lès-Fleurs, from Henri, the idiot, to M. le Maire himself, not a sight of Captain Blondel did I get. His dory had been drawn above high-water mark

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and all its gear removed, so that I was in the long run forced to extort from a fisherman the information that M. le Capitaine was veritably gone—to London, on *affaires* of great moment. One gathered that he was negotiating to take over a job which, to the fisherman, seemed one of great magnificence: the superintendence in the French ports of some group of British colliers. The fisherman expatiated on the wealth that would accrue to Captain Blondel thereby. “*Beaucoup d'argent, ces anglais,*” he assured me; which was a compliment to my French if not to my tailoring.

This information seemed somehow to remove Captain Blondel forever from the small orbit of my life, and I began thereafter to forget him. Our days on the beach were full enough, and there was all Normandy to see—from Fécamp on the one hand to Harfleur on the other. Even when we passed a day among the Gothic glories of Rouen I do not remember that I paused to reflect how often Blondel must have sipped his vermouth on the terrace of the Victor. God knows that I might have been a happier man to-day if I had seen no more of him! God knows—a lot of things. The fact is, I did meet Captain Blondel again and heard his story; and that is why I am trying to tell now not a prettily-rounded tale to please the boudoirs, but a true story that, for me, has bridged in a manner almost distressing the gap between boyhood and maturity. This queer thread of continuity running through the complexity of life. . . . But I must try to let you have it starkly.

It was on the eve of our departure for home that I climbed by one of the shady paths to the top of the

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western cliff so that I might enjoy, for half an hour alone, a last look at that marvellous coast-line—the clear edge of the cliffs, sharp like cut paper against the cloudless sky, the lime-green of the inshore waters, the profound blue of the sea beyond. It is an intense experience to be alone up there, looking down from a dizzy height on the rocky beach and the creaming waves, back on the wheat and colza and poplars of the fat Norman fields. Paradoxically, the intensively-cultivated land of that plateau seems always deserted. The widely-spread farms are hidden in clumps of trees, and two women in black, bending over their field-tasks a mile away, seem only to accentuate the loneliness. But it is a rich desolation. The tethered cows and horses feed luxuriously on fat red clover. Seldom in England does one see crops so green and thick. Be it a special richness of the soil or a result of the industry of the French, those fields seem to reek of fecundity, and even the wild-flowers—poppies and cornflowers and scabious and coltsfoot—grow thicker, larger, and more brilliant in colour than I remember to have seen elsewhere.

There is a nook on the edge of the cliffs up there above Grèves-les-Fleurs where one has, within a half-turn of the head, such a panorama of coloured sea and lush country as no other land, surely, has to offer; and it was there I lay when Captain Blondel came surprisingly upon me. His shout of greeting startled me nearly out of my wits.

“Ha, you there!” he cried gaily. “Peeping at the girls on the beach, no?”

It was clear that he was in the most jovial of his many humours.

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"I thought you were in London," I replied.

"I been," he replied, "I been, but I am back. *Voilà*," and with that he plumped down beside me.

"We go to-morrow, I'm afraid," said I.

"To-morrow! You go? To Garvel?"

"No. To London. I haven't been back to Garvel for many years."

"Garvel a ploody fine place," he said, suddenly thoughtful. "If you go back to Garvel. . . . Did I not tell you I know Garvel, like the back of my hand, by Chris'? More than thirty years ago. *Mon dieu*, nearly forty years ago! I tell you a story about Garvel, a ploody fonny story, be damn. . . ."

And with that he began. I have told you it was that story of his which inspired this chronicle of mine, and now I am anxious lest I do not get the setting just right—the fantastic quality of this encounter on the Norman coast: this flashy little gasbag of a Frenchman and myself possessing funds of knowledge about a small and distant Scottish seaport and its people, which were so soon to be fused to complete an old story: the braggart mood in which he told his tale, the sombre mood in which I listened to it. Tones, temperaments, philosophies—these things are so important, and so difficult to get on paper. However——

This Hippolyte Blondel had been sent at the age of seventeen, he told me, to Garvel, there in one of our old shipping offices to learn the language and what he could of our mercantile practice. His father, a notary of Rouen, made him an adequate allowance; he was agreeably lodged with the widow of a Free

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Church minister; and he was, by his own account, very happy in Scotland. And then he fell in love.

"She was lovely!" he cried, giving the adjective three endearing syllables. "So lovely! Never have I see a girl so lovely."

She was, it appeared, a girl who was often, as he was also, about the house of his employer.

"Lilian, they called her," he went on. "I called her my lovely Lilian."

Lilian! I knew only one Lilian; and it was at that moment there came flooding back to my mind all that had happened in my boyhood and that had been so nearly forgotten. Perhaps I flushed or started at the shock, for the little man looked at me sharply.

"You know of whom I tell you?"

"No," I protested. "No, I do not think so."

"You were unlucky then in Garvel, for she was the mos' beautiful—By Chris'!" he cried, waving his hands, "she had the loveliest fair hair. Her neck—it was like her lovely name. And her blue eyes. Those eyes—ah!" And here he kissed the tips of his fingers in ecstasy. Then suddenly he turned confidential. "They said she was cold, those others. They said she was—you call it——"

"Aloof," I volunteered weakly.

"Yes, aloof. They said she was cold, aloof, mysterious. Yes, by Chris'! she was mysterious, that Lilian. More mysterious than they knew."

He put his hard little eyes near to mine and poked my body with his fingers.

"I knew. For I loved her. And she loved me." He lay back on the grass and sighed. "Never was I so happy as in her arms. Never! Among the heather,

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in the woods there—in her arms. By Chris'! that Lilian knew how to love.”

He was silent then for a space—and I was suddenly miserable. For now I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt of whom he spoke, and I had on me the misery of one who is forced to hear what he ought not to hear, what he does not want to hear. Even the beauty seemed in a flash to have gone out of our immediate surroundings. The beach far below was but a litter of dirty chalk and weed. The poppies on the edge of the cliff were merely tawdry. And this Frenchman, this mongrel got by sentimentality out of lechery, had become hateful.

“Never was I so happy as in her arms,” he had begun again before my swirling thoughts had had a chance of crystallizing. His sigh offended me; the sigh is allowable only to the reticent and the reverent. And this was merely boasting in a subtle form. But I was paralysed. The man was free to talk sheer filth for all I could do to stop him.

“And then my father,” he sighed again, “my father he get angry. He hear from the office. I do not work. I spend too much money. I learn nothing. And a letter come—O, an angry letter. If I no come home, my money stop. Finish. *Comme ça*,” and he snapped his fingers. He ended on a plaintive note. “It was hard. I love that Lilian, and it break my heart to leave her; but he was my father, and I must obey. By Chris'! How we cry together, that Lilian and I!”

He paused again, and there came to me a momentary feeling of relief, for I thought that his story was told. It was bad enough to hear the tale of Lilian

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Maxwell's adolescence from these gross lips. That she of all women should, even in the simplicity of girlhood, have loved a Hippolyte Blondel: that her secret should be spilled like a smoking-room story before a stranger . . . that was as much as I, for whom she remained a sentimental memory, could stand. He had given me quite enough to think about. "In her arms," he had said. Kilmeny in the arms of Dionysus! No, it was unthinkable. I remember how, in that moment of distress, I battered myself into believing that I had listened to nothing more than a story of generous, innocent, youthful passion. What if the man, in advanced middle-age, chose to make a dirty story of it? Men are like that. Sex-starvation, boastfulness, lechery—we have labels in plenty to describe the tendency. And I have no doubt now that Blondel's story, so far, was a story of innocence. But he insisted on taking me further.

"Nearly forty years ago, by Chris'!" I heard him exclaim, "but I have it still, the pain, the—you call it?—yes, the agony!" He touched his heart. "I suffer. I cry. I curse, be damn! And that Lilian. . . . *Mon dieu*, she make a scene! Our last night come. We walk up to the Cráigs—you know—and we cry. By Chris'! what a crying! And before we say good-bye we swear that whatever happen, whatever bad thing happen, we meet again. If in our lives any big and 'orrible thing happen, we meet again."

Now the man was as nearly serious as he could be, and I began to feel that this affair had been for him really tragic and beautiful. 'And perhaps it was—but what a capricious creature was this Frenchman, this sailor!

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"Very fonny it was," he said reflectively—and laughed.

Again I could do naught but listen. With his objectivity and with, I must admit, his ignorance of my special knowledge, he had me at his mercy. There I was: pinned, as it were, in that nook on the cliff-top, with the beach far below and the flat fields behind. There was no escape.

"Very fonny! Yes, very fonny!" he cackled. Then he pointed a finger at me. "Do you know? That Lilian did come to me again. You no' believe me? I tell you, by Chris'! She came to me again. And why? Because she love me. . . ."

Could I have stopped him then? Stood up and walked away? What, in the name of Heaven, could I have done?

"It was years ago now," I heard him say. "I was home after a long voyage, and a letter come. A letter, such a letter! I was married, Lilian also. I have no children, she have three. Often I tell my wife, if I married Lilian I have ten children. My wife does not like that, but I laugh."

And he laughed again. It was, for him, all very funny.

"That letter! The poor Lilian!" he went on, suddenly sentimental again. "She have lost one of her boys. Killed—by an automobile. *Comme ça!* And what do you think she say in that letter?"

He waited a moment for an answer, but I could only shake my head.

"She say she must see me again!" cried Blondel triumphantly. "Me! Her lover! She must see me again! *Hein?*"

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It was a good joke in his view: a delightful vindication of his personality; and once more he laughed.

"She must see me again, by Chris'! She must see me at once. She is coming to Paris to see me. I must be in Paris to meet her. It was very fonny. . . ."

He drew his knees up to his chin and looked out over the sea. There was a pucker of thoughtfulness about his eyes, his lips were tightly set. I do believe that then, for one moment, at least, Hippolyte Blondel was visited by some sense of the tragedy of his story, but I am bound to record that the mood passed quickly. Laughter returned to him, and the satyr leered from his hard-bitten face.

"We meet in Paris," he said gently enough. "We live together. For a week. That Lilian have forgotten nothing. We are happy as ever—happier. What a week! Never, by Chris', was I so happy in her arms."

He dug his elbow into my ribs, and then I could have wept. Perhaps I should have struck him in the mouth. But what could he, poor little lecher, know of Harry Maxwell: of John Maxwell, pathetic among his carnations: of the pain that was gnawing at the heart of Harry's mother? After all, so strange is this life of ours, perhaps it was this Hippolyte Blondel, or what he stood for, who did more than anybody else on earth to appease that pain!

III

That is my story, but I can add a footnote to it, for I have by accident seen Lilian Maxwell since I saw the last of Hippolyte Blondel. Family affairs took

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me back to Garvel last winter and, meeting John Maxwell in the street, I was easily enough persuaded to visit him and his wife in their home. It was not the flat in Forsyth Street that I knew so well. John Maxwell had made money during the War, and though his two older boys had married and settled far afield, he had bought a great villa in the West End and, consciously or unconsciously, provided his wife with a perfect setting for the beauty of her old age. These great houses in Garth Street were built when fortunes were being made out of the importation and refinement of cane sugar, and Lilian Maxwell shone with the warm grace of an Old Master against the oak panelling of her spacious hall and the large coolness of her drawing-room. She was well over sixty by then, but even looking at her with eyes made sharp by intimate knowledge I could see but little change in her. Fair she had been all her life and fair she remained; cool, quiet, and beautiful as ever, the woman who greeted me so calmly and kindly was, save for a hint of more perfect repose, the woman I had seen drive away in Jock Wright's cab that Saturday morning so many years before.

The three of us dined together, a little uneasily, I felt. I do not think that John Maxwell was quite accustomed to the new magnificence of his mansion, and his wife was never the one to make a sentimentally hearty affair of a meeting of the kind. The wine was champagne, of all preposterous drinks, and it signally failed to remove the inevitable awkwardness of our reunion. It was only when we came to the excellent port, properly and reverently decanted, as I was surprised to see, that we two men began to

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thaw and to resume the habits of that old intimacy which had been broken by the mobilization of 1914.

We went back, as we were bound to do, and Lilian Maxwell sat there, listening and smiling faintly from time to time. John Maxwell was clearly dying to re-live those days of his greater happiness, and it was he who was most enterprising in reminiscence. "Do you remember thon day, Georgie, when . . ." The irrelevant things we did remember—the fire which consumed Park's hen-house; old Mr. Allen's remarkable resemblance to Gladstone; Tommy Matches, the half-wit comedian of our suburban streets! And so, inevitably, we struggled over the barriers of shyness until we were talking freely and fondly of Harry. For me, at least, it was delightful at last to be laying the friendly ghost of whom in adult life I had spoken to no one but my wife. To feel that the wound smarted no longer, that the memory of Harry had no longer the power to agonize—that was oddly gratifying.

"After all," I said a thought carelessly, "he would only have lived to go into the War. Perhaps he was lucky. . . ."

I watched the face of his mother, but there was no sign there of any emotional response to what was, perhaps, a clumsy remark. John Maxwell, however, true to type and strengthened in sentimental conviction by his own excellent port, had to embroider the theme.

"That's right, Georgie," he said heavily. "I wouldn't say but you're dead right. Poor wee Harry was taken away pretty roughly, but it was mebbe better than a couple of years in the trenches and a

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bullet at the end of it. I remember when his brothers were in the fighting. You remember, Mother? . . ."

Lilian Maxwell inclined her head ever so slightly, but no more than that. She seemed to me then more magnificently self-contained, more perfectly poised, than ever. But her husband had to go on with his blundering.

"Aye, Georgie! Mebbe Harry was one of the lucky ones, if you look at it the right way. Still——" and now he sighed heavily, "it was a terrible time for us all. I remember when they 'phoned me the news. I thought—Georgie, I felt . . . I thought I would have been glad to die myself. And poor mother there. D'ye remember, Mother? D'ye remember you had to go away for a while—away to your sister's in London?"

I cannot tell you how miserable I was in that moment as, suddenly, I felt the cutting edge of fate's irony. What afflicted me was not, I assure you, a mere sense of social awkwardness; it was the agony of a desire to know the truth about Lilian Maxwell, to be justified of my faith in her. The little Norman lecher—and this cool and beautiful mother of my friend, Harry! Had Blondel really been fine and strong in his youth, and their love so splendid that her flight to his arms was a passionate necessity in her hour of pain? Or was he just a symbol, a mere *something*, representing vaguely the haven she was compelled to seek in her misery? Then there struck me like a blow the thought that, in the eyes of the world, *she* might be the sinner. . . . And then I came to myself to realize that I was gazing blankly at my hostess.

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But Lilian Maxwell did not answer her husband's question. Inscrutable as ever, she sat at the end of the table facing the window. The evening light was on her hair, and her deep eyes were steady.

